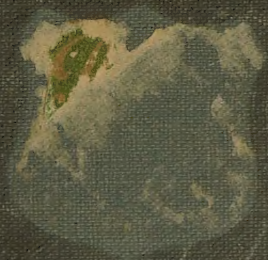


The Hidden City
Philip Gibbs



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THE HIDDEN CITY

By Sir Philip Gibbs

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(WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN TO THE WORLD)
THE ROMANCE OF EMPIRE
KNOWLEDGE IS POWER
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THE HIDDEN CITY

A NOVEL

By

PHILIP GIBBS

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TO MY SON
ANTHONY

TO WHOM, AS THE AUTHOR OF "YOUNG APOLLO,"
AMONG OTHER NOVELS, I TOUCH MY HAT

THE HIDDEN CITY

I

SOMETHING unusual was happening in Walpole Street, Chelsea, where as a rule nothing more exciting happens than a cat and dog fight, or a funeral now and then, or a visit from a piano-organ, not so frequent now that Mussolini keeps his Italians at home. It was, in fact, the beginning of a great adventure in the life of a young man. A youngish man of thirty-five, to be exact.

Like an actor gentleman, thought a maid-servant at Number 11, who drew aside a grubby lace curtain in her master's dining-room—he was still in bed, being a late-working journalist—at the sight of a neighbour fixing something on to the door of Number 13. She withdrew from the window hurriedly when she caught his glance which smiled at her in a friendly way as though he were enjoying a joke of his own and desired to share it with the world.

He was screwing on a brass plate, and stood back to admire the effect.

DR. JOHN JEVONS

“Well,” he said to someone in the open doorway, “that’s that, so to speak. And now ‘they also serve who only stand and wait.’”

He took another look at his brass plate, and at the house behind it—a thin house of three floors, with an iron balcony, and a basement behind area railings, exactly like every other house in the street, apart from a coat of new paint and a girls’ training college

at the King's Road end and a pawnshop at the corner. Nothing much in the way of houses, one might say, though they had asked a stiff rent for this mousetrap now that Chelsea had become fashionable again for people stricken with the income tax, but holding for him the promise of adventure, and work, and knowledge of life in which he was interested.

"Come and finish your coffee, Jacko," said his sister Janet, who had been watching his handicraft with signs of amusement. "That brass plate is magnificent, but it isn't breakfast."

She resembled him when she smiled, and there was a family likeness in their dark eyes, though she was not quite so distinguished-looking. For certainly Dr. Jevons, who had just put up his plate, had something about him that made people—and especially women—turn their heads and smile when he passed. Not an Adonis by any means, but he was tall and lean, with a keen tanned face—more like a naval officer than an actor—and he had humorous eyebrows and a kind of enthusiasm in his look as though he liked life and wanted other people to like it and would try to help them if they didn't. A rare look nowadays, it seems, at least on rainy days along the King's Road, Chelsea—out of which is Walpole Street—where life is rather drab to those who only see the drab side of it.

"I'm afraid London is distressingly healthy just now," he remarked as he went back to his breakfast table and glanced admiringly round this little sitting-room where he had put up some quite nice etchings and some pencil drawings of his own which weren't bad. He also admired the swing bookcase in the corner, which he had picked up as a bargain in the King's Road.

"You're a ghoul, like all doctors," said his sister.

His eyebrows which had a funny twist to them moved slightly.

"Last night you accused me of being an idealist!"

"So you are," said Janet, careless of contradiction, and with a faint smile about her lips because this brother amused her a good deal. "A hopeless sentimentalist, Jacko. A knight errant in search of dragons. And I don't believe you'll take any fee for killing the damn things, except by compulsion."

"Oh, won't I? You watch me! Wait till that telephone gets busy. London calling Dr. Jevons!"

"So far the only person who has rung up has been a milkman—touting for orders," said Janet demurely.

She had a sense of irony which was never sharp-tongued or acid, so that he laughed at her gibe.

"Give me time," he said. "That brass plate will dazzle the eyes of the neighbourhood. . . ."

He glanced round the room again, and liked the look of it.

THAT telephone on the swing bookcase was a dumb beast for some time after the fixing of the brass plate. It was, anyhow, abominably uncommunicative to a young doctor who could not afford to pay for a practice after three years in the Elder Dempster line—Liverpool to West Africa—without much saved after his last voyage, apart from a small legacy from his grandmother which came in very handy now that he had set up in London with his sister Janet.

Still, he found himself fully occupied for a time, staining the floor-boards to avoid the expense of carpets, reading psychotherapy, in which he was getting interested, and making bookshelves for the room he called his study. He was busy in his mind and in his feet. They worked together very harmoniously because he found it necessary to study the geography of his future practice in a neighbourhood that was unfamiliar to him. The London Hospital had been his pitch as a medical student, after two years in France with a field battery—and lucky to be alive. Then at week-ends and odd days off he had gone down mostly to Canterbury where his people lived, until those three rather wasted years as a ship's doctor. Now he felt a stranger in London with an unknown life about him and a younger generation which had grown up since his student days.

He wanted to get the hang of this life in London—which he found extraordinarily romantic and hauntingly beautiful after lonely seas and a sunbaked coast. It wasn't a bad scheme to get a general idea of people's mentality and mode of life before offering them his professional services.

"A neighbourhood full of possibilities," he thought, "and quite amusing from the point of view of a general practitioner."

At the top of his street lay the King's Road, along which he walked with a loose stride and watchful eyes—like an explorer in

a new country—every morning after breakfast, in time to see the little shop girls hopping off the buses to their day's work in the great store of Peter Jones at the corner, to the cash chemists which sold all the quack medicines for modern maladies, and to hat shops, hairdressers, modistes, tobacconists and small traders, this side or that of Sloane Square.

He liked the look of those girls in short frocks and silk stockings. They seemed to be facing up to life very well, with a fine spirit and a sense of humour, not caring a damn, so to speak, whether it rained or snowed, except to put on Russian boots, and dodging the traffic and its ceaseless surge with a smiling disregard which filled him with admiration. There was nothing wrong with them, he thought, unless they saved too much on their lunches to buy those stockings, or got bothered about love—too many girls and not enough boys—or let their nerves go to pieces by working early and dancing late. Janet seemed to know a lot about this kind of thing.

"They'll feel the strain of life later on, poor darlings," thought Dr. Jevons.

Old Mother London had speeded up the rhythm of life and the pace was getting hot. A good-looking crowd, he considered, these modern wenches with their short hair and twinkling legs. He found them more attractive than the West Coast ladies.

Some of them caught his glance upon them and smiled back. There was something friendly, but not forward, about him, they thought. Funny eyebrows too!

Little old squares led off the King's Road and Dr. Jevons walked round them, believing that one day their doors would be opened to him. Here dwelt some of the future patients who would need his help. He took a stroll round Wellington Square, built a hundred years ago, he guessed, with those beastly little basements and stuccoed fronts where poor little drudges worked among the beetles down there in the Early Victorian era. Now the slavey wore silk stockings like the shop girls and had her rights and her evenings out—good luck to her impudence! And some of the houses had been newly decorated by West End firms for old ladies who had moved out of big houses in Eaton Place—on account of death duties and income tax, he supposed—and for smart young

couples who drove up in Morris-Oxfords—he thought of getting one. Not many perambulators about though, he noticed. Babies didn't seem to come into their scheme of life.

It was the same sort of thing in Markham Square, with rather a good church at the end, on the edge of an unexplored slumland. Much the same in Royal Avenue with a stretch of bare gravel between two rows of plane trees, leading down to Chelsea Hospital where the old pensioners lived. A grand old building, that, of red brick gone brown, with long rows of well-spaced windows and high chimneys over dormer windows. Doctor John Jevons decided to have a look at the banqueting hall one day. That pretty hussy Nell Gwynne had started this home of rest for old soldiers—bless her naughty but generous little heart. It was a boon to have those open gardens where nursemaids brought their children—well, there were some children still being born!—and chatted to the old gentlemen in red coats or blue, while girls from the blocks of flats round about Sloane Gardens—very expensive—brought their dogs out for exercise and a frolic with their pals. It was a mistake, thought Dr. Jevons, to keep Alsatians and big beautiful brutes like that in London flats. Not that he blamed them much, having a soft spot in his heart for anything on four legs that might reasonably be called a dog.

Beyond the gardens lay the Thames, and John Jevons who had been a ship's doctor, found himself going that way most days, to lean over the parapet of the Embankment and watch the tugs go by. Away down there, beyond the port of London, was the grey sea which he had come to hate on the whole because of its hideous monotony, broken by ugly tempers. He had had to live in uncomfortably close quarters with a captain who dabbled in spiritualism when he got home to Liverpool and a first officer who was a loose-living fish with a strain of brutality, and passengers who played cards all day if they weren't sick. At the end of the voyage out were those West African ports crowded with buck niggers and fat negresses, nice folk really, sweating in the relentless sun. He had been thrown back on his own resources and had read omnivorously—Conrad, Wells, Kipling again, and odd novels dropped by the passengers. And he had done a lot of thinking in a vague sort of way, until he became absorbed in this new study of psychology.

He had been put on to that by trying to get at the captain's mind. A queer case that—repressed instincts and odd obsessions due to some phobia of childhood. . . . Well, all that was a dream now. Here he was, starting a new life in London with all sorts of ideas in his head. . . . These old Georgian houses along the Embankment were rather fine. He might pick up a patient or two, with luck, behind those doors with brass knockers. . . . Hadn't Rossetti lived along here? . . . And that power-house with its tall chimneys faintly pencilled through the white mist above Chelsea bridge would make a good drawing. He might have a shot at it one day if he had time for that hobby of his.

Along the King's Road again—a raffish sort of street and very amusing—he observed other people who might call for him one day. Some of them were shabby young men, often without hats, and sometimes carrying portfolios, who stared into antique shops and into picture shops with copies of old masters, or original pictures that had gone spotty or black so that some of their horrors were hidden.

Artists, beyond a doubt, and feeling the draught of post-war conditions and a national indifference to art, anyhow. Dr. Jevons came to know one or two by sight. One of them was a tousled-haired young man with a touch of side whiskers and a rather attractive face which looked a bit "nervy." He was always smoking cigarettes from a long holder bought at Woolworth's for sixpence (as the doctor knew because he bought them there himself), and accompanied sometimes by a pretty girl who hung on his arm outside the greengrocer's shop where they bought potatoes and bananas and things, haggling at the price in a joking way.

"No superfluous cash, and a poor market for works of genius," thought John Jevons. "But love—and a baby coming! Well, not a bad adventure, if they keep their courage up."

III

FURTHER down the King's Road was the picture palace. Cute, Cosy and Comfy. Pola Negri in "The Loves of an Actress." Dr. John Jevons spent some of his time here and found it profitable, as a student of the human mind and a general practitioner in search of a practice. It was the social rendezvous of the neighbourhood on dull afternoons or wet evenings. They mingled in the darkness, staring towards that screen with its moving drama. They were the shop girls who hopped off buses at Sloane Square, some of the smart young women who took their dogs into Chelsea Gardens, some of the old ladies from Wellington Square, the young couples with Morris-Oxfords but no perambulators, the young toughs who hung round the coffee stall at the top of Royal Avenue and others who went with the tide down King's Road, Chelsea.

"My patients," thought John in the darkness. "And if there's any influenza about they'll catch it here, sure as fate."

He decided that there was a worse danger here than influenza. As a student of psychology, he knew that he was in one of his laboratories.

It was that stuff on the screen ; not bad, some of it, and sometimes extraordinarily well-done, with a sense of drama, beauty and emotion. Some of these film actors were talented, and the lighting effects were admirable. There must be a good deal of genius behind it—the genius of men who knew modern psychology and how to play on its instincts and desires. It was all very well for critics to scoff at the movies, but here was a technique and a medium which gave people an escape from the drabness and monotony of their own lives and put a dream before them which called to their own unsatisfied impulses. Here was laughter—good human comedy—here were spaciousness and splendour and the picture of all that wealth can buy. Here was adventure in the wild places

of the world, or in everyday life. Here was Romance—a yard away from the King's Road with the buses crawling through a wet fog. And here all the time was Love; the love of strong men for blue-eyed beauties; the love of young hearts divided by cruel circumstances until the last inevitable kiss, unduly protracted, with a happy marriage and lots of money utterly assured: "the Goods and the Girl." Here was the love of the vamp, the love of the apache, the love of sailors, soldiers, policemen, heroes and humorists. Here was love in a garret, love in a palace, love in the moonlight, love in the South Sea Islands, love in an aeroplane, love in a girls' school, and love everywhere.

"Over-emphasised," thought Dr. Jevons.

It all seemed to him rather teasing to boys who can't afford to marry and to girls who can't get boys to marry them. It liberated the secret dreams of elderly spinsters, the polygamous instinct of married men, the heart's desire of unhappy wives. It was the fairy tale of stunted souls and the eternal adventure which lurks in city streets or dark forests.

Next to him in the darkness sat a boy and girl. He had seen them when the lady with the lamp flashed her torch on them for a moment to show him his seat. It was one of those little shop girls with her best boy—seventeen and eighteen, perhaps—munching chocolates. He could hear the crinkle of the paper bag and, presently, suppressed giggles from the girl after a loud sneeze from a youth with a cold in his head. After that they were silent, and John Jevons who was studying his future patients and the life around him, was aware that those two young bodies had snuggled up to each other in this kindly gloom in an embrace that was only broken when the lights went up.

"Why shouldn't they?" he asked himself, striding back to Walpole Street. "Who can blame them?"

Outside the post office a boy with newspapers displayed his placard: "*Typist strangled in a City Office.*" (For a moment he wondered if it was an answer to his question.) The blind man next door stood listening to the traffic of buses and taxis and the passing of many feet. There was something rather fine about the face of that square-shouldered fellow who had been blinded in the war. John Jevons decided to have a talk with him one day.

IV

GOING home down Walpole Street, the young doctor in search of a practice glanced through the windows of the girls' training college and one of the small houses they had taken next door. In the front room of the small house half a dozen girls were sitting round the table writing letters, doing needlework and chatting to each other after tea. One of them looked out of the window and caught the sideways glance of John Jevons, and smiled at him, and then laughed across the table to one of her friends.

"A pretty hussy," thought the young doctor. "I wonder if she ever goes to that picture palace. But if she thinks I'm going to give her the glad-eye, she's mistaken. I'm taking no risks until I've established myself—and not then! . . . I wonder if I can afford a Morris-Oxford?"

He did not overhear the remarks of the girl in the front room.

"There's that young doctor at Number 13. I believe he gave me the glad-eye!"

"Oh, Lucy, you're absolutely shameless!" protested the young lady on the other side of the table. "And you're always thinking of wretched men!"

"I like 'em!" said the shameless one. "I want to be loved. I'm fed up with this manless institution! And that young doctor has awfully funny eyebrows! I wish I could invent a disease or something, just to get to know him. But I'm so beastly healthy."

"You ought to be spanked, my dear," said the moralist on the other side of the table.

Dr. Jevons gave a glance at his brass plate—it was a bit cock-eyed after all—and let himself in with his latchkey. Janet hadn't come home from work yet. Mrs. Meggs was laying tea in his consulting room which he sometimes called his study.

"Has anyone rung up, Mrs. Meggs?"

Mrs. Meggs breathed hard, as she always did after coming up from the basement.

“Meaning the telephone, sir? No, sir, barring a wrong number. ‘Sorry you’re troubled,’ said the young lady at the other end. ‘No trouble,’ I says.”

Well, one day he would get a patient. Lots of time ahead!

V

JANET was a helpful lady to her brother at the beginning of his new career, and afterwards. At first he had been a little shy of her sense of humour, and of something that was rather elusive behind her frankness—some secret door in her soul which she kept locked. They had been separated on and off since childhood's days when they had been together in that old house at Canterbury next to the preparatory school of which his father was headmaster. During the war his leave had coincided with hers now and then—she was serving in a canteen at Abbeville as a dark-eyed thing of eighteen—and they had done a few shows in town together with boys in the East Kents, before going down to Canterbury where their father and mother yearned for them. That was after Dick—the eldest—had gone West in the first battles of the Somme, and before Robbie, who came between John and Janet, died of wounds at Étaples.

After the war, when he had resumed work as a medical student, Janet had stayed down at Canterbury—he remembered a frantic letter from her saying that she was utterly “fed up” and must get something to do, or die—and then, later, when he was a ship's doctor, she had come up to London and taken a job in a hat shop in Sloane Street. There she was now, earning enough to keep herself and working from ten to six, with an hour for lunch. Rather amused with the job, she said, and anyhow keeping herself from brooding.

“Blessed be drudgery!” she remarked cheerfully, and he agreed with her, being anxious for work.

She had a kind of elegance, he thought, which he missed in some of the younger crowd—those kids who had come along in legions while he was ploughing the seas between Liverpool and the West Coast. She didn't fling her legs about so much—not that he minded that—and she had a quiet way of moving and a low-toned voice, and

long, well-shaped fingers which looked well when she was mending her stockings or something of the sort, as they sat together in the evenings, or played a thing of Chopin's now and then on a piano for which he had stretched a point, being a devotee of music. He had watched her with new eyes, as it were, when they set up house together, and was surprised to find her so attractive—with something spiritual and elusive about her. She had dark hair and eyebrows, like himself (though not comical eyebrows with a queer twist to them like his!), and there was a humorous line to her lips as though she looked at life with irony, not taking it too seriously as he was inclined to do now and then. She seemed to have thought things out, and he was surprised quite often at the amount she knew about things which to him were dark mysteries as yet.

It was really very pleasant to have a sister like this. It made all the difference to life in Walpole Street when he was waiting for a practice. They did some theatres together as in the old war days—the Court Theatre was very handy across Sloane Square, and they could get into the pit without standing in a queue too long. Afterwards they sat up yarning over cups of cocoa which she made over a gas ring in the study—his consulting room as it might be one day—when Mrs. Meggs was safe in bed, as they could hear by a queer snuffling snore which, for a time, until they had located the sound to the top bedroom, had made Janet believe, or pretend to believe, in some ghostly visitant.

They had some pretty frank talks together, as brother and sister who had become great pals again—old-fashioned word, nowadays—but always he suspected that she kept one little door closed against him. Why not? Everyone has a private sanctuary, and he did not pry. One night he came close to it perhaps—too closely and too clumsily—when he startled her by a sudden suggestion.

“You ought to get married, Jenny. Rather selfish to monopolise you like this, isn't it?”

She looked up from the cocoa she was boiling in a small saucepan and her eyelashes fluttered for a moment.

“Do you want to get rid of me? . . . Think of taking a spouse, Jacko?”

“Good lord, no—not for years—if ever! But I was just

thinking that you would make a very charming wife for some lucky lad, and it's a pity to keep him waiting."

"You mean I'm getting old! Thirty-two. That's nothing now that we've shorn our locks and our frocks. Still, I don't dream of babies any more. . . . Have some more cocoa?"

She poured out his cocoa to the last drop, very neatly. But presently he was aware of a rather long silence and saw, or thought he saw, that those dark eyelashes of hers were wet. It was utterly unlike her. He had jangled some secret chord by his clumsy tread.

"That war made a difference to some of us, didn't it?" she asked in a matter-of-fact way.

He tried to remember what difference the war had made to his sister. It was eight years ago since the end of it, and he was beginning to forget. But he remembered a boy named Lavington, who had been keen on Janet before he failed to come back from a night-raid. And there was Eric Jackson, son of a Dean of Canterbury, who used to write home to her, until he lay out in No Man's Land on the barbed wire. And Hargreaves, who was captain of Harrow before he became a major and went "missing" in Delville Woods. And others.

"Do you ever talk of the old war now?" asked Janet, in a casual sort of voice.

"Not often," he admitted. "Only when I meet a man who was out there, and get yarning by accident."

Janet laughed.

"It's odd, isn't it? There's a new crowd grown up who don't know a thing about it, and don't want to. They stare at me as though I were Queen Elizabeth or a great-grandmother, if I happen to mention it ever. The fact is, brother John, you and I are ancients compared with these boys and girls who were in the nursery when we were serving in France. And yet I feel elaborately young sometimes—ready for any adventure that comes along."

"You bet!" said John. "And we're going to have them too. We're only just beginning. The adventure of work. Service to humanity. And a Morris-Oxford for week-end joy rides."

"That telephone doesn't trouble us much," remarked Janet, with that ironical smile of hers. "Humanity seems singularly indifferent to your desire to help it, Dr. Jevons!"

"Lots of time," said John.

He put his arm about her and kissed her when she said good night outside her room. He had bumped up against that secret door of hers. Very unfortunate.

"And so to bed!" said Janet sleepily.

VI

DOCTOR JEVONS made some friends in his neighbourhood before long, and obtained information from them likely to be of use to him in his future career—if that telephone started ringing. Nice fellows, anyhow. One of them was the policeman who had Walpole Street in his night beat and flashed his bull's eye on to keyholes and window catches, as a matter of routine. John entered into conversation with him one night after a lonely evening at the Court Theatre—a Bernard Shaw play—when Janet had gone to see some of her friends.

"Inclined to be foggy again," he remarked, as he felt for his latchkey.

"Ah! I wouldn't be surprised," said the constable in a non-committal way.

He was a young man with a straight nose and a good chin. The doctor had seen his type before in a previous chapter of history.

"Pretty cold work, sometimes," he suggested. "Not much fun on a lonely beat, perhaps."

"Not too bad," answered the policeman. "The new doctor here?" He turned his bull's-eye on the brass plate and gave a more friendly glance at John Jevons who stood under the lamp-post.

"Trying to work up a practice," admitted John. "Slow work, of course. A healthy neighbourhood, I should say."

"Ah!" said the policeman thoughtfully. "You ought to know." He became more communicative with a second glance at John Jevons.

"Plenty of accidents, of course. A bad little smash to-night in Sloane Square. One of them lorries bringing vegetables to Covent Garden. Collided with a mail van and killed the driver."

"Bad luck!" said John.

The policeman laughed quietly, as though he had a humorous reminiscence.

"Reminded me of Ypres, when the transport used to be knocked out at the cross-roads."

"What was your crowd?" asked John, warming to him with a sudden sense of comradeship.

"East Kents. 8th Battalion. Private Widgery."

"You don't say so! I was in the 8th. 1917 and onwards."

He held out his hand, and the policeman hesitated for a second and then gripped it tight before saluting with a shy kind of laugh.

"Thought I knew your face, sir. Them eyebrows, if I may say so! Once in Bourlon Wood, if I remember rightly? A little trouble with a machine-gun nest. Well now, that's queer!"

They both laughed at the queerness of it.

There was the inevitable war talk. . . . The sergeant-major. . . . That night raid. . . . The March 21 show. . . .

"Better come in and have a drink," said John.

No, he couldn't come in and have a drink. It was more than his job was worth. Besides, he was due round at Cheltenham Terrace in a few minutes.

"Much crime hereabouts?" asked John.

Nothing that you could properly call crime, he thought, except a murder now and then—mostly about love affairs—and a few drunks and disorderlies, and area sneaks and an occasional burglary. Just the usual run of things in a thickly populated district.

"There's been a bit of suicide," he added as though referring to a slight epidemic. "People fed up, you know. On the dole and so forth. Not much doing in the way of work if they happen to lose a job. And what the newspapers call 'dramas of passion.' Nerves and all that."

"Yes," said Doctor Jevons thoughtfully. "The strain of peace, eh?"

The young policeman laughed again.

"Not so bad as the strain of war, in my opinion. But then, I'm lucky. A nice job, excellent rations, and a good little wife. Well, I'd best be getting along. Here's luck, sir."

He saluted again, and John heard his soft tread going down Walpole Street just as Janet drove back in a taxi from friends in

South Audley Street—rather smart friends whose acquaintance he had not yet made.

“Getting sweet with the police?” laughed Janet, jumping from the taxi.

“One of my old crowd,” said John.

VII

THEN there was the man at the coffee stall in Sloane Square—bald-headed with a yard of apron round his waist, and an asthmatical cough at times. He was something of a philosopher and amused John, who liked to take a cup of coffee with him now and then just to make his acquaintance and to study his customers. Some of the gallery folk and one or two of the smart crowd from the stalls thought it a bit of a joke to have a snack here now and then, after the play, before departing by underground or taxi-cab to other parts of London.

Some of the girls took incredible risks of pneumonia and other lung troubles, thought John. They came straight out of the theatre in flimsy little frocks and precious little underclothing, with a light cloak over their shoulders, and stood with their young men, sipping hot coffee between squeals of laughter and chatter about the play.

"Perfectly putrid! . . . Did you ever see such bilge? What a foul-looking girl that was in the first act!"

"Personally I dislike plays about vital problems. Not that I'm a prude, you know. Still, it does make one feel a little awkward with one's parents, poor darlings!"

So one night the conversation had gone on while John listened to the younger crowd. How sure they were of themselves. How ruthless in their judgment.

The man behind the counter winked in a knowing way.

"Anything for a new game," he said to John when that little group had departed. "It's my belief they'd welcome another war, just for the thrill of it."

"God forbid!" protested John, with a sense of dismay.

"Their minds work too rapidly," said the coffee-stall man. "They're always yapping about life. And they don't know the first thing about it. Not the first! Wait till some of them young

hussies have brats and come slap up against the snags. That'll learn 'em."

"They're rather apt to dodge that particular snag," said John.

"Gord!" said the bald-headed man, "I'd like to see some of these young women with five kids, and one to come, in a bed-sitting-room down Markham Street way. With their man out of work and no money to pay the doctor. That's the real thing."

The man behind the coffee stall wiped a cup and saucer thoughtfully and then coughed with violence.

"That's the real thing, and not much chance of playing at life, as my old girl used to know before I got this job. What beats me is the different luck of people. Injustice, I call it. Not that I'm Bolshie or anything like that, you know."

Some of the customers at this coffee stall looked cold on raw nights. There was that chap who sold the late editions, sheltered from the draught in Sloane Square station, but with his teeth fairly chattering sometimes.

One night when John passed by, a thin mantle of snow lay on the little No Man's Land in the centre of the Square, railed off by posts to make a merry-go-round for the motor traffic, and the roofs and parapets of the Court Theatre and its surrounding houses were edged with ermine. The tall white cross of the war memorial with its golden sword down the shaft—strange symbol for the Prince of Peace!—reminded John of a calvary at which he had once stared across barbed wire beyond Arras when snow like this lay over the ruins of a village called—Lord, how one forgets!—Neuville Vitasse. A few flakes were falling, blurring the electric lights over the Court Theatre where *Yellow Sands* was being played, and whitening the wind-screens of taxi-cabs. It was a good scene, with a touch of Romance in modern London.

"Good evening, Doctor," said the coffee-stall man with his asthmatical cough. "Like a blinking Christmas card, ain't it?"

John exchanged a word or two, not inclined for a talk to-night, as Janet would be waiting up.

"A cup of coffee and two sausages on toast," said a man's voice over his shoulder.

"Oxford accent," thought John, turning slightly to look at this new customer. It was a young man, shabbily dressed, with

his coat collar turned up and the brim of his felt hat turned down.

Rather a good-looking lad of twenty-two or so, but not very cheerful to-night, judging by the line of his lips and a blue look about his face.

"No," he said suddenly, with one hand in his trouser pocket. "A cup of coffee without the sausages on toast. Sorry!"

John stepped away from the coffee stall, with a nod to the bald-headed man behind the counter. Then he turned and went back. Something in that boy's face, and that countermanded order, made it difficult for him to go on to Walpole Street.

"Have something with me, old man. A hungry sort of night, eh?"

The young man stared at him from beneath the brim of his felt hat where the snow was settling.

"What the hell do you mean?" he asked angrily.

John felt as if he had been struck in the face after a friendly gesture. Well, it served him right for being a silly sentimentalist.

"Sorry," he said. "I had an idea . . ."

He strode off again toward the King's Road. It didn't do to hurt people's pride in London, or to play the philanthropist to young gentlemen who speak with an Oxford accent. Still, he was pretty sure that the boy had wanted food and couldn't pay for it. He saw him again, two days later, coming out of the pawnshop at the corner of Walpole Street, not looking pleased with himself.

VIII

JANET had some nice friends and they came round now and then to Walpole Street, generally in the evening after supper (most of them having work to do) or at tea-time on a Sunday. One of them was Nina Ziborova—a Russian girl who was in the hat shop with Janet—a vivacious little lady with black hair looped over her ears, and a long amusing mouth, and high cheek-bones, and eyes that betrayed a touch of Tartar ancestry. She spoke English almost perfectly and expressed herself on life, and death, and English civilization, and religion, and morals, and music, with astonishing fluency and frankness. She had a brother named Serge who appeared with her sometimes and kissed Janet's hands, much to her amusement, and drank innumerable cups of tea, and wept over the woes of Russia if anyone encouraged him. He had once been a naval officer and was now a traveller in ladies' under-clothing.

Some of Janet's friends seemed to belong to the little shops in Beauchamp Place which John passed sometimes on his morning walks, when they were dressing the windows with an eye for artistic effect. They were the daughters of country folk, or elderly colonels who had fought in the great war, or clergymen with big families, and though they lived the life of shop girls during the day, working pretty hard, John guessed, they made the most of their evenings among their own social set which seemed alarmingly aristocratic, judging from the number of young peers they knew by fancy names. A new kind of "double life" which had been adopted since the war by girls who had broken away from the sheltered homes of England and established their independence as wage-earners and workers. Gay little ladies with plenty of pluck, thought John who studied them with professional interest. They seemed sharp as needles and much amused with themselves. Utterly frank in their way of speech; facing life wide-eyed and

unafraid. But nervy and restless, and always smoking cheap cigarettes through long holders, which couldn't be good for them.

He was able to study a select group of Janet's friends one evening, when she announced her intention of giving a party.

"Just coffee," she said, "and some sandwiches which Mrs. Meggs can make all right if I keep an eye on her."

"Fine," said John. "They may want a doctor after it."

Janet rewarded this remark with her low-toned laugh. She was carrying some tulips which she had just bought from the red-cheeked wench in Sloane Square by the war memorial, and standing there in her black frock, in front of an oval mirror, looked like a portrait by Augustus John.

"I hope you'll like Gilbert Blake," she said. "He writes plays and novels which are not very successful. He's rather a friend of mine."

"Then I'll like him," said John, and he noticed that her eyelashes fluttered as they always did when she was shy with him.

"He's an idealist—like you!" she added as though on the defensive. "And Lucy is rather a trial to him after two years of marriage. Something wrong with her."

"After two years, eh? Can't they stick it out longer than that—these young people?"

"Oh, it hasn't come to a break. Just nerves, and not much luck for Smudge, as they call him. Did you see what the critics said of his play to-day?"

"At the Haymarket last night? Yes. You thought it rather good, didn't you?"

She had come home excited about it. It had made her pipe her eye a little, so she had enjoyed it, as John remarked with friendly sarcasm.

"Then there's Cynthia," added Janet with a laugh, as though Cynthia amused her. "She buys her hats at my shop and is rather naughty . . . but very beautiful!"

"I like beauty," said John. "And I'm old enough to take care of myself!"

"I wonder!" exclaimed Janet, looking at him curiously, with that elusive smile of hers.

She also expected a young man named Basil Hyde, the son of

the Cabinet Minister, and highly intellectual, though a bit weak perhaps. He was a Socialist, much to the annoyance of his father, and he played the piano like an angel, and was very much in love with Cynthia, poor boy.

"Why poor boy?" asked John. "I daresay he likes being in love with Cynthia."

"She treats him like a puppy dog," said Janet, smiling at some reminiscence. "Or uses him as her chauffeur when she wants a drive and is too lazy to drive herself."

"Any others?" asked John.

It appeared that others might drift in. Joan Wittington from the Lyric, as pretty as Polly Peachum. And Betty Truslove who did fashions and society stuff for one of the papers.

"Well, you might mention to some of these people that I have a pretty good bedside manner," suggested John. "Headaches cured by kindness. Appendicitis rapidly diagnosed. Nervous disorders treated in the greatest confidence."

It was a bore, he pretended, that evening party, especially as he wanted to do some serious reading.

But after all he was rather amused by Janet's friends and quite interested.

Nina Ziborova was the first to arrive with her brother Serge, who kissed Janet's hands very tenderly and said "Beautiful lady!" in a voice of reverence, and then strolled across to the sandwiches. Nina kissed Janet on both cheeks, though she had been working with her all day, and then sank on to a silk cushion before the fire, like Pavlova in the "Swan Song."

"This climate!" she cried. "Is it not very hellish for poor exiles like us? No wonder you English people have no joy, no passion, no love of beauty. Your abominable fog has crawled down my throat like a slimy beast."

"Wash it down with some coffee," said Janet in her matter-of-fact way.

Then Cynthia Ide arrived with Basil Hyde, who had brought her in his car. She was a tall girl with hair as golden as wheat at harvest time, cut short, and big blue eyes that looked a little tired, like a beauty of the Restoration painted by Lely.

"I'm afraid I shan't be able to stay long," she announced rather

languidly. "Basil is taking me on to a dance, if we don't get lost in the fog. I rather hope we do get lost. It might be amusing."

"Come and talk to my brother," said Janet. "He's a doctor, you know. You may want him if you get smashed up in that fog. Always on the telephone!"

"I'm afraid of doctors," said Cynthia, glancing at John with her tired blue eyes, which had a sense of humour in them. "They ask one such compromising questions."

But she seemed to like John, after a second look at him.

"That sounded rather uncivil," she admitted. "But I was only speaking theoretically. Do you mind if I squat here for a little?"

She "squatted" very charmingly on a cushion by his chair, with her hands clasped round her knees and her chin tilted as she talked to him. She was like an Elizabethan page, he thought—wiping out that image of a Restoration beauty—with her fair hair cut straight at the back of the neck and her slim boyish figure in a rose-coloured frock. She had pretty bare arms, and her head was poised in a rather jolly way. Twenty, he guessed, or perhaps a year younger, and wonderfully attractive, like so many of these post-war girls who seemed to think it was their day out.

"Do you think you could provide me with a cigarette?" she asked. "A Turk for preference."

He provided her with one which she put into a long holder of white ivory.

"How many a day do you smoke?" asked John.

She had never counted. Fifteen—twenty—thirty—if she felt bored.

"Very soothing to the nerves," she remarked with a smile.

"You ought not to be conscious of your nerves at your age," said John.

She smiled incredulously.

"No——? . . . How about late hours, heated rooms, traffic-dodging down the Portsmouth Road, general hecticcity and the soul-sickness of a futile life?"

"Speaking seriously?" he asked, rather startled by that last phrase.

"Oh, I'm quite amused with myself," she answered, as though

not speaking quite seriously. "Unfortunately I'm like Noel Coward's 'Poor little rich girl.' I have to go about saying, 'Horse, horse, play with me!' when all my friends are working."

"Why not work?" asked John.

She found the idea rather humorous.

"I wasn't brought up that way. And I don't really like work. And my father is Sir Francis Ide."

She saw that the last bit of information did not mean anything to this young doctor with the funny eyebrows and hatchet face like a naval officer—or a priest. Yes, a good deal like a Catholic priest, she thought.

"He owns half the picture palaces," she told him. "It's rather profitable, so that I needn't sell hats or anything. That's my handicap."

She was "rotting" him a little, he could see that. But he didn't mind. He rather liked this girl with the straw-coloured hair. In spite of her slim boyishness, or because of it, there was something alluring about her. She talked in a comradesly way, as though she had known him for years, perhaps because she knew Janet so well.

"Is there anything more I can tell you about myself?" she asked amiably. "Or are you bored already with one of the Bright Young Things who worry our idealists?"

"Tell me some more," said John.

She decided that on the whole she had told him enough for one evening. She preferred to ask him a question—scientific—which bothered her now and then. If he didn't object?

"Fire away," said John, smiling. "I may not know the answer."

She laughed before asking the question, to take the edge off its portentousness.

"Tell me, doctor, do you believe in heredity?"

John twitched his mobile eyebrows. A queer question for a girl like this, as pretty as a jonquil in Kensington Gardens. Of course, she was just pulling his leg.

"Heredity is pretty important," he said. "You see it in race-horses and pedigree pigs and Persian kittens. But environment is equally important. . . ."

He was prepared to launch forth a bit, but didn't get the chance.

"Oh, then I'm twice lost!" cried Cynthia Ide. "Only don't tell anyone. A little secret between you and me. Thanks so much! . . . And there's Smudge looking suicidal after the critics have carved him up."

She sprang up from her cushion to greet Gilbert Blake and his wife Lucy.

Gilbert Blake—Smudge, as they called him—was a delicate-looking fellow of twenty-eight or so, with a high forehead and shy eyes, and a sensitive look as though he lived a good deal in a dream world and was rather worried with the unkindness of reality. His wife Lucy was a white-faced lady with lips too highly coloured, who spoke with a tired voice and drooped into a chair like a lily fainting for water.

"How's the play going, Smudge?" asked Cynthia.

"Another failure," said Gilbert Blake. "The critics have written its funeral oration. Six months agony, and now a slightly lingering death!"

He laughed, but not mirthfully. He had been banking on that play for weekly bills and new frocks for Lucy, and a whiff of success, which a writing man needs to go on writing.

"I saw a good notice in the *Evening News*," said Janet. "'*Love lies Bleeding*, by one of our brilliant young dramatists.' Won't that help?"

"Not a hope!" answered Gilbert Blake. "Mr. James Ague said, 'It left the audience stone cold.' Mr. Champion Bluffer said 'Pasteboard and sawdust!' . . . How I hate those bald-headed vultures who whet their beaks after the first act!"

Cynthia Ide took his hand and patted it.

"Don't look so murderous, Smudge. All your friends are going to pay for their seats—in the pit!"

"Good for them!" answered Blake, recovering his good humour.

"I loved it," said Janet. "It was just you, Smudge!"

He looked at her with thanks in his eyes before he answered with his touch of shyness.

"I'm glad. . . . But that's what other people don't like."

His wife Lucy, that white-faced lady with the crimson lips,

was leaning back in the low arm-chair, with her hands drooping over its arms and her eyes shut, and a faint smile.

"So kind of you, Janet!" she said, opening her eyes again and glancing at her husband. "All authors need an atmosphere of adulation. Don't they, Smudge?"

"Encouragement," he answered quietly.

"One can't write without a certain amount of self-confidence," he added after a slight pause, "and that's killed by hostile criticism."

"But why write?" asked his wife, a little mockingly. "It's so worrying, and so unprofitable. How much better to sell boots!"

"I agree, but then you see, I haven't been trained as a boot-maker," said her husband, as though explaining something quite patiently to a small child.

"You might have made a very good stockbroker in your father's office," said Lucy. "Still, of course, I'm a Philistine. I prefer flesh-pots to the mess of pottage. And seriously, aren't too many people writing nowadays—and not much like real life as far as I know the funny old game?"

Gilbert Blake, called Smudge, sighed heavily and looked annoyed for a moment at these questions which challenged his scheme of life. His wife perhaps was continuing a conversation which had already wrecked a morning's work.

Then he laughed good-naturedly again.

"It depends how you look at life," he replied, but his hand trembled slightly as he struck a match for the inevitable cigarette.

"Some nerve strain," thought John. "A clash of temperaments between a young husband and wife before the necessary compromise. That fellow looks ready for a breakdown. I wish I could help him."

"Heaven defend us from plays that deal with real life!" said Basil Hyde—a young man with dark hair smoothly oiled and evening clothes that were almost too elegant, thought John, especially as he wore a camelia in his buttonhole. There was something a little Oriental about him—not that that was against him. But some of the oil on his hair had leaked into his personality.

"Now you're trying to be highbrow, Basil," said Cynthia Ide, who was perched on the arm of Lucy's arm-chair. "It's the latest pose to like red-nosed comedians and crook plays. We're so

superior to real life that it's rather a bore, isn't it, when they try to put it on the stage."

"Exactly!" said young Hyde, kissing his hand to her. "I'm all in favour of the movies. Why pay twelve and six for a dud show—no reference to Smudge's masterpiece—when you can see Pola Negri for one-and-ninepence in a comfortable seat with pleasant music and smoking allowed. No approach to reality to prick the guilty conscience. The drama of democracy."

"Hark at our little Socialist!" said Cynthia mockingly.

"A lot in it, I'm afraid," said Gilbert Blake, the dramatist. "I can't compete against the little film stars bathing in champagne."

Two other people came in, nice to see on a foggy night. Betty Truslove, the journalist girl, excited by a "scoop" she had brought off—a secret marriage between an elderly peer and a post-office girl; and Joan Wittington, who played at the Lyric, and played a little now, very charmingly, as she described her journey through the fog with an adventurous driver.

"I trembled in every limb as he took the corner of Walpole Street and missed the pawnshop by a hair's-breadth. Wow!"

She trembled with exaggerated fear at the horrid thought of it and begged for a strong cup of coffee to steady her nerves.

"Play something, Janet," said Gilbert Blake.

"Yes, the divine Chopin!" cried Nina Ziborova who was leaning her head against Cynthia. "He will make us forget the London fog and the misery of this abominable life—which, after all, has its beautiful moments, in rooms like this!"

"In Russia before the Revolution——" said Serge Ziborova.

Cynthia held up a finger for silence.

"Hush!" she said. "Janet plays."

A charming picture, thought the doctor. This scene in his study would make a good subject for Orpen: "A Room in Chelsea, 1926." His shaded lamp on the swing bookcase next to the telephone threw its light onto the black hair and pale face of Lucy Blake—the wife of the dramatist—deep sunk in the low chair, with her hands drooping over the arms of it. Cynthia had left her seat on the fender and was now curled up on one of the cushions with her hands clasped round her knees and with the firelight twinkling on the gold of her hair as she leaned her head against

Nina Ziborova's white shoulder. Serge Ziborova sat perfectly still and impassive in the shadow beyond the lamp-light, thinking, perhaps, of that time when he escaped from Bolshevik Russia after horrors that were unimaginable in Chelsea.

While Janet played a prelude of Chopin's, Gilbert Blake, who wrote unsuccessful plays, crossed the room closer to her and leaned with his back against the wall, not noticing that his wife was watching him through her half-closed eyes, with that faint smile about her rouged lips. Basil Hyde, after a moment's restlessness, took the fender seat and blew a whiff of cigarette smoke into Cynthia's hair, until she turned suddenly and threw his cigarette into the fire and made a little grimace at him.

This sort of thing, and these people, thought the young doctor, looking round his room, are what civilisation means at its best, just now. I should say this group represents a fair average of intelligence and character. There must be thousands of rooms in London with people like this, talking about plays and books, listening to music, amused with each other, not greedy or cruel or vicious in any way. That Cynthia girl is astoundingly attractive—and the type of all those boyish-looking girls I see outside Harrod's and the other shops. Nothing much the matter with them, except a touch of nerviness. . . . What was that she had said?—"The soul-sickness of a futile life." . . . Pulling his leg, of course, when she asked him that question about heredity. Rather amusing!

Suddenly the doctor sat up in his chair and listened. A little bell was ringing above the swirl of notes—like a splashing waterfall—of Chopin's prelude played by Janet. She heard it too, and slurred her notes.

"The telephone, John!"

John went quietly to the swing bookcase with raised eyebrows.

"Another baby who wants to get born into this naughty world," suggested Nina Ziborova.

"Hush!" said Janet.

She was watching her brother with a look of expectation. His face was perfectly impassive, as though often summoned to the telephone. A voice was calling to him from somewhere in London.

"Is that Dr. Jevons of Walpole Street?"

"Speaking," said John.

"Oh, this is Police Constable Widgery. A young man in a bad way at forty Smith Street. Better come along, sir, and rather quick. You can't mistake it. Opposite Markham Square."

"At once," said John.

His first patient, at last!

"Excuse me," he said to Janet's friends before he left the room with a smile at his sister who was watching him with luminous eyes.

"Wonderful, a doctor's life!" said Gilbert Blake, the dramatist. "Like Haroun al Raschid. All doors open to him. A thousand and one adventures of passion and tears."

"Don't dramatise, Smudge!" said Lucy, his wife, in her tired voice, a little sharp-edged.

IX

SMITH STREET, opposite Markham Square. Yes, easy to find in an ordinary way, especially as John had passed down it several times in his study of the neighbouring geography. It led down to St. Leonard's Terrace, with its old Georgian houses facing the Duke of York's School with its open field. There was a lodging house at one end, he remembered, with a notice of "*Beds for Men*," and most of the houses had "Apartments Furnished" in the front windows, and lights burning in the basements on dull days. He had seen a man mending cane chairs in one of those dungeon rooms, and a canary in a cage in another further up the street, and some children playing with their dolls at a grimy window below ground. Not much chance of joyous health in rooms like that, out of the sunlight and among the beetles. That was where the diseases of darkness were incubated. Rickets, which the Germans called "the English disease." Something still wrong with civilisation, though things were getting better in that respect.

Nina Ziborova was right about the fog. It got down one's throat like a slimy slug. The traffic was crawling slowly down King's Road, nearly invisible a yard or two ahead. The street lamps only pierced the darkness with a dim blur of light. Drivers were shouting to each other. "Why don't you look where you're going?" yelled one humourist on a taxi-cab who collided with another, not seriously, at the corner of Royal Avenue.

It was very dark down Smith Street, and the fog seemed to be creeping up from the river like a legion of black demons. Not a glimpse to be had of the numbers behind the fanlights.

John went up the steps to a front door and lit a match which fizzled in the black wetness. Number Fifty—well that would put him right for Number Forty. Five houses further down, if the

numbers ran odd and even on each side. He collided with a dark figure which loomed upon him.

"Now then, what the . . ." said a stern voice.

"Sorry," said John. "Not much visibility to-night."

A laugh came from the black figure.

"Oh, it's you, doctor! Thought I'd put you right."

It was Police Constable Widgery who raised his bull's-eye lantern.

"Another case of attempted suicide," he exclaimed. "A young fellow fed up with things. Pasted up the door and windows, turned on the gas, but forgot the keyhole. One of the other lodgers smelt it and kicked the door open. Now the young gentleman feels very sick and sorry for himself. Thought I'd better send for you."

"Nice of you to think of me," said John.

"A matter of duty," said Police Constable Widgery. "Mind those railings, sir. And there's the house, with the door open. I'll come up with you. I'll have to report it."

John had no need to knock at the door. An elderly woman stood there, peering out into the fog, with a shawl to her mouth.

"Is that the doctor?"

"Yes," said John. "How's the young man?"

"'E can't get his breath, poor dear. May God forgive him for turning on the gas, when I'd just put a shilling in the slot."

"I'll go up," said John.

"As nice a young man as ever trod the earth," continued the woman, "and I once saw him on the pictures when he gave me a free seat before he was turned off at the studios and fell behind with his rent. Holy Mother of God, to think he should do such a thing, and me a merciful woman who never presses my lodgers too hard, poor dears, but have my own troubles and a husband in drink."

"That's all right, Mrs. Murphy," said Police Constable Widgery. "Upstairs, doctor."

The fog had crept into the house with its sooty smell, mingled with a reek of onions from the basement and a faint whiff of gas. The stair carpet was torn, and the doctor caught his foot in the rent and stumbled. On the first landing the other lodgers had gathered

—two young men and a neatly dressed girl, and a little maidservant who was mopping her eyes with a grubby apron.

"We might all have been blown to blazes," remarked one of the young men resentfully.

"Good job the Prophet smelt it so quick," said the girl.

They stared curiously at the young doctor from Walpole Street as he passed them with a friendly nod.

On the top landing a door was open, and an elderly man with a haggard face and grey hair stood there waiting.

"The Lord has preserved him by the hand of His humble servant," he said gravely. "Samuel Bunce, sir, at your service."

He bowed to the doctor, who was anxious to see his patient but was stopped by the upraised hand of the elderly lodger who had a further communication to make.

"It happened thus, sir. I was reading the Holy Book—Revelations, Chapter four, verse six—when a Voice spoke to me out of the silence, saying 'The spirit of evil is close at hand.' It was then that I smelt the gas, sir. With strength given to me by supernatural powers, I forced open the door and beheld the body of our young friend lying like unto death. With a cry to the Lord I flung open the windows and liberated the stifling vapours which, as I have no doubt, symbolised that spirit of evil against which the Voice had warned me."

"Good for you, Mr. Bunce," said the constable. "Saved the young gentleman's life, beyond a doubt, spirits or no spirits. Better go in, doctor."

John went into a bed-sitting-room in which the fumes of gas were still faintly lurking. The electric light was turned on and the gas fire had been turned off, perhaps by that gloomy old gentleman whom the girl downstairs had called the Prophet. The room was in some disorder, with a chair overturned and some clothes lying on the floor. On the bed, next to a washstand, lay a young man in shirt and trousers, whom John recognised at a glance as the one he had seen one night at the coffee-stall in Sloane Square, and again coming out of the pawnshop at the corner of Walpole Street—like one of those young officers he had known in the war. He had a dead-white face and was being violently sick into a basin on the floor.

"Oh, Christ!" he groaned, after a spasm of sickness which seemed to wrench his heart out, before he flung himself on to the bed with one arm hanging over the edge of it.

His lips had a bluish tint and his eyes were puffy. Carbon monoxide poisoning, but not as serious as it might have been if that old gentleman hadn't heard a Voice, or smelt something. He was breathing all right, and that sickness was the best thing that could happen.

"Any telephone in this house?" asked John after feeling the boy's heart and pulling down the lids of his eyes.

"One at the pub near by," said Police Constable Widgery.

"Ring up the hospital," said John. "Ask them to send round an oxygen cylinder, and give my name. They'd better be quick. . . . And before you go, give me a hand with this bed. Better shift it into another room where the fog is fresher."

"Oh, Jesus!" gasped the boy, leaning over the side of the bed in another spasm of sickness, before he was dragged into the room opposite where the gloomy old gentleman dwelt. A big Bible lay open on the table there, and the walls were hung with texts prophesying woe to the children of unbelief.

They were wonderfully quick with that gas cylinder, and John liked the look of the young doctor who came with it—alert and cool-headed and an expert in the administration of oxygen.

At the end of half an hour he put his gadgets into a black bag and smiled at John.

"Well, that's as much as I can do. Glad to be of use. This young man hasn't done himself much harm. Two minutes more would have made a difference, eh? . . . Well, good night. Foggy, isn't it?"

That boy who had gassed himself was lying back on the bed with his eyes shut. The oxygen had counteracted that carbon monoxide. There was a faint colour in his skin, which had been corpse-like. His sickness had passed. He was breathing more easily.

A handsome lad, in the opinion of Dr. Jevons. Like a Greek cameo, with finely cut features. Perhaps a little weak about the mouth, and a neurotic type, but an interesting face—delicate and sensitive—like a young Chatterton lying there with his shirt open at the neck.

The old gentleman who had been his saviour—Mr. Bunce—had gone downstairs to talk with the other lodgers. Police Constable Widgery had gone on his beat again. The doctor was alone with his patient.

"Feeling better?" he asked.

The boy opened his eyes and stared at John.

"Sorry," he said presently. . . . "All this fuss . . ."

"That's all right," said John. "My job, you know."

The boy seemed to be thinking back to things.

"Why the hell did they want to interfere?" he enquired irritably. "Now I've got to face it all again. Pawn tickets—cagging on friends—no, I'm damned if I do."

"You'll be damned if you don't," said John.

The boy pondered over that remark for a moment and then smiled faintly.

"I don't believe in that sort of thing," he said weakly. "Anyhow, I was willing to take the risk. . . . A fellow can't cadge. I was fed up with it all."

"No luck in the acting line?" asked John.

"Not for months. . . . Nothing doing in the studios. . . . All American bilge. . . . Not even crowd work."

"What about your people?" asked John. "Couldn't they help you a bit? Some other job?"

"Oh, my people!" said the boy.

He laughed bitterly, and John was glad to hear him laugh, though he heard the bitterness. Getting better, anyhow.

"My people gave me the boot. At least my father did. Not a word of sympathy or understanding."

"We're all inclined to think we're misunderstood," said John, soothingly.

The boy's face flushed, and he glanced uneasily at this doctor who had dragged him back from darkness and a bad dream.

"I'm not excusing myself," he said rather sullenly. "Of course, I've asked for it all right. . . . And I wish to God I was dead!"

He turned his head on one side and shut his eyes and John saw his cheek become wet with tears, and he was filled with a sense of pity for this boy who hadn't been strong enough to face up to the first hurdles.

He leaned over him and put his hand on his shoulder.

"You'll like life all right one of these days," he said cheerfully. "There's a lot in it worth while, if you have a spark of courage and a sense of humour."

He felt the boy's shoulder shift under his hand with a feeble shrug.

"Not easy, I know, old lad! Hellishly difficult when you haven't any food in your stomach and when your watch and other things are round the corner with Mr. Solomon. I can guess all that. But I have a conviction that your luck is going to turn."

"Not a hope!" answered the boy despairingly.

"Good Lord, yes! You take it from me. I don't mind making a sporting bet that one of these days you will get a lot of fun out of things. . . . Why not?"

The boy smiled faintly again before he answered after a long silence.

"You're a giddy optimist."

"Rather!" laughed John. "No gas for me! I'm all for fresh air and self-preservation."

Presently the boy sat up a little and leaned on his elbow.

"It's nice of you to waste your time on me," he remarked. "I don't know why the hell you should."

"My job," said John. "I'm keen on other people's lives—just to forget my own egotism. It's a hobby of mine."

"Do you charge anything?" asked the boy, with a touch of irony.

"My rich patients will have to pay for the poor ones," answered John good humouredly. "Hardly fair on them, perhaps."

"Well, you won't get a fee from me," said the boy, "unless I pawn my last pair of boots."

"One of these days I'll send in a bill," threatened John. "When you're driving your Rolls-Royce with a little movie star."

For the first time the boy laughed out loud.

"Well, I must say you're a bit of a humorist."

A little later he slipped off the bed and staggered as he clutched its iron rail.

"I'll be getting back to my own room. I don't want to do the old Prophet out of his beauty sleep. . . . God, my head!"

"Better put your arm round my shoulder," suggested John.

He helped the boy back to his own room, and laid him on his bed, and leaned over him, smiling.

"No more gas to-night, eh? Nothing foolish. Give me your word of honour?"

"That's all right," said the boy. "You needn't worry. I've had my dose, and it was quite unpleasant. I still feel like catting my heart out."

He lay back on his bed, with one arm flung across his forehead.

"Well, I'll be going," said John. "And I'll look round in the morning. We must get you a job of work somehow—and get those things out of pawn. By the way, how do you call yourself?"

"Pardoe. Not my fault you know! Christened Eric, by my fond parents."

He held out his hand to John with fair civility. "Thanks," he said. "Very decent of you and all that. Sorry to have made such a fool of myself."

As John left the room he saw the boy lean over to the table by his bedside and take a letter which he had propped up against the water-bottle, and tear it into small pieces. No need of that farewell letter to a father who had been hard with him, or to a mother who might have worried about him. That gas had been a failure, owing to an old gentleman with sensitive nostrils or an ear for angelic voices.

Outside in Smith Street, and the King's Road, the fog had lifted. The buses were moving at a faster pace. In Walpole Street a light was shining through the front room window of the doctor's house. Some of Janet's guests had gone—the charming Cynthia with her dancing partner and Gilbert Blake the dramatist with his red-lipped lady, but Janet was playing cards with the two Russians and Betty Truslove the journalist.

"I go five no trumps!" cried Nina Ziborova exultantly.

"My dear Nina!" protested Janet, shocked at such audacity.

They looked up as John entered.

"Interesting case, Jacko?" asked Janet, smiling at him above her cards.

"Only a boy in need of fresh air," answered John quietly.

"Any cigarettes left?"

X

IT was odd in a way that John's second patient should be that girl Cynthia Ide who had been at his house on the night of the fog.

"Things are beginning to hum, Jacko?" said his sister when the telephone bell rang as they were having lunch together—a quick lunch in Janet's case, as she had to get back to that hat shop.

"You'll soon have an extensive practice," she added chaffingly. "—unless it's another wrong number!"

He caught her smile as he picked up the receiver on the swing bookcase and said, "Dr. Jevons speaking."

A woman's voice, rather affected, he thought, spoke into his right ear.

"Oh, doctor—good morning! This is Lady Ide speaking. It's about my daughter Cynthia. She knows your delightful sister, you know. We get our hats at that enchanting little shop—and *so* cheap! Well, the darling child has caught a bad chill, or something. Motoring in this odious weather—how rash! I wanted to call up Dr. Wainwright of Harley Street—the dear good man!—but Cynthia says she can't bear his whiskers. Isn't that *too* ridiculous!"

"I'll be round as soon as possible," said John rather curtly, like a doctor with a big practice.

He put down the receiver and helped himself to some more jam-roll, admirably made by Mrs. Meggs downstairs.

"It's that lovely lady friend of yours, Janet. Cynthia of the straw-coloured hair. She's caught a chill. Her mother rang up, and by the way she spoke I should say she has dyed hair."

"She has," said Janet surprised at the psychological discovery. "I'm sorry about Cynthia."

She was silent for a moment, and then smiled at some secret thought.

"Of course, she asks for it," she added.

"Tell me about her," said John. "I was rather attracted by her the other night."

Janet laughed in her quiet way.

"I noticed it! Not surprising, John. I've never seen a man who wasn't. They get excited when she's about. Sex-appeal, I suppose! When she comes into the hat shop even the errand boy gives her the glad-eye—the urchin!"

"That fellow Basil Hyde seems keen on her," said John. "Couldn't keep his eyes off the wench. Why doesn't she marry the lad and put him out of his misery?"

Janet was amused by that simple suggestion for the happiness of a briefless barrister.

"It might mean misery for her, don't you think? Most of her men friends can't afford marriage just yet, and, as Cynthia says, she doesn't want to be dragged down to squalor in the very flower of her youth and beauty."

"Oh, she's one of those, is she?" remarked the doctor disapprovingly. "As selfish as a Persian kitten."

Janet put up a defence for this pretty friend of hers.

"One has to make allowances," she said. "Of course, she's been pampered since she was a tiny thing. Her father is Sir Francis Ide, the 'movie king,' and frightfully rich, I believe. Her mother used to be Dulcie Devereux who sang naughty songs before the war—at the Empire, wasn't it?"

Dulcie Devereux. Good heavens! John remembered her a thousand years ago—or was it twenty-five? He had a vague remembrance of a youthful passion for her. . . . Cynthia's mother!

"That accounts for something she asked me," he said thoughtfully. "Hereditary and environment! I thought she was pulling my leg a bit."

"You never know with Cynthia," explained Janet. "She has a whimsical mind. Some of the things she says are—well—rather alarming to a pre-war woman like me. The modern girl talks as she thinks—without reserve."

"I'm in favour of it," said John. "It liberates the subconscious."

He puffed out a cloud of bluish smoke and stared through it thoughtfully, and was silent for a few minutes.

"I'm not sure that I'm cut out for a general practitioner," he said presently. "I've no faith in drugs and physic. I want to get at people's minds really. That's what interests me. From what I've seen of this old city I should say that people's minds want more treatment than their bodies. Nerve strain, and not to be wondered at. Sex troubles—and no guidance. Soul-sickness, as the Lady Cynthia said in a phrase that has been sticking in my head. That's the line I would like to follow up."

Janet looked at her brother rather doubtfully.

"Rather a dangerous line, Jacko! One's mind is so queer, isn't it? One remembers things one wants to forget. Little imps of the past come up and gibber at one when the bedroom door is shut. Unsatisfied desires. . . . Silly dreams."

"Exactly," said John. "Repressed instincts. Neurosis. The cause of half the ills of civilisation."

He glanced at his sister for a moment through a smoke ring which he had just puffed out. He wondered what little imps were worrying this helpful comrade of his when her bedroom door was shut. In spite of her sense of humour, and the fine poise of her spirit, she had a look of sadness sometimes, hidden behind her long eyelashes which fluttered if she were at all self-conscious, as they did now for a second when she was aware of his glance.

"We're hardly beginning to understand how the mind controls the body," he said, rubbing the bowl of his pipe on his nose which was an old habit of his. "Wrong thinking produces physical malady. Anger alters the blood-pressure and interferes with the internal secretions. Melancholy results in indigestion and lowered vitality. Those imps in the subconscious mind play the very devil with the heart and liver. The reverse is equally true, I'm afraid. The mind gets out of gear if people play the fool with their bodies. This civilisation of ours is overstraining the mind. All these blinking lights of London, the noise of traffic, the excitement of senses, the competition for life, how the devil can people keep normal?"

"Are you talking nonsense, brother John?" asked Janet.

"Thinking aloud," he answered. "Talking through my

hat." He knocked out his pipe in the fireplace, and roused himself.

"I must go and look at that pampered lady. . . . But we can't cure a common cold in spite of all our scientific progress. We're all quacks."

"Me for the hat shop," said Janet. "And by the way, Jacko, when are you bringing in that lost sheep of yours?"

"I expect he'll stroll round to-morrow," answered the doctor. "Thanks for getting his room ready, old girl. Very sporting of you."

Janet laughed and shook her head.

"It's absurd!" she said, with a faint touch of annoyance which was only half assumed. "You can't give house room to all your impecunious patients, John. Besides, the boy will be a dreadful nuisance. It will make things different between you and me. Two's company, three's none."

"Oh, he will stick to his own room a good deal," said John carelessly. "It's only until he gets a job."

"Well——" said Janet.

It was no use arguing with this brother when he had really made up his mind to anything. And he had made up his mind to give a bedroom upstairs to that boy Eric Pardoe who had tried to gas himself in Smith Street. It was partly, John explained, because the youngster reminded him, astoundingly, of a second lieutenant he knew in the war—killed by a shell in Bourlon Wood.

"I'd like to help this kid because of that other lad who died," he had said last night to Janet. "It's an odd fancy of mine."

"It will only lead to trouble," Janet had argued. "The boy is obviously neurotic."

"Exactly. That's why I want to give him a hand."

No use arguing with a quixotic brother who was very obstinate, utterly absurd, and a hopeless idealist! Besides, she was very fond of him.

"Give my love to Cynthia," she said.

XI

THE Ides lived in Cadogan Square on the other side of the King's Road, where the outskirts of squalor are left abruptly at the railings of the rich. Two minutes away were mean streets with bed-sitting-rooms. Here were big pompous houses set round four acres of garden in which some neat nursemaids were perambulating the pink-cheeked babies of the well-to-do. Round the railings a portly butler with side whiskers was giving a little afternoon's exercise to his mistress's lap dog and working off a heavy lunch. At one end of the garden was a hard tennis court, and John's ears twitched at the sound of tennis balls and a cry of "Love fifteen!" on a February day with a twitter of birds in the bare trees and a glint of sunshine in the windows.

"Better than my prescriptions," thought the doctor. "I wonder if I could persuade some friendly lass——"

The Ide's house had had its red bricks newly scraped, with a raw effect out of harmony with its sombre neighbours. Its knocker was of abnormal size and the head of a brass lion grinned at John as he tweaked its nose and gave a dump on the door.

A Rolls-Royce—a glory of gleaming metal—lay alongside the kerbstone, with a chauffeur dozing at the wheel.

Dulcie Devereux's town house, and very different from Smith Street. Out of his beat really.

A young footman opened the door and stared at him coldly until he announced himself as the doctor.

"Her ladyship is expecting you," he remarked with less hostility, and was good enough to take the visitor's hat and gloves which he handled gingerly, the hat being somewhat shapeless, though comfortable, and the gloves grubby after a week of fog.

"So kind of you to come!" said the voice that had spoken to him over the telephone.

It was Lady Ide in her morning-room, to the left of the hall.

She was ready to go out in that Rolls-Royce beyond the front-door, and held out a gloved hand with her head on one side and a smile that used to charm the hearts of the gallery boys in the good old days before the war. And even after that. Yes, John remembered having heard her sing once at the Empire, or somewhere, when he was home on leave, and, later, his battalion had marched through Ypres to that song of hers when she was "doing her bit" for the boys, after her marriage perhaps to Sir Francis Ide. War service and patriotism! How did they go those words? Absurdly they came into his head again stored away in that subconscious mind which remembers everything though the conscious mind forgets.

"Hallo, hallo, it's a different girl again!
Different eyes, different nose,
Different hair, different clothes—"

As a boy at school he had dreamed of this alluring little lady. She had symbolised the beauty of womanhood in his adolescent mind. He had kept a picture post card of her in his desk. Now she stood before him with an enamelled face like a mask of youth, and little faint lines about her lips and eyes, yet still slim, with a girl's figure and a frock above her knees.

"You will find my darling Cynthia very troublesome," she said. "She refuses to admit that she's at all unwell."

"Perhaps there's nothing the matter with her," suggested John cheerily.

Lady Ide looked startled by this diagnosis.

"My dear good man! The child is quite feverish, and no wonder, I'm sure, after a joy-ride last night in an open car with nothing on. Idiotic, I call it."

"Rash, certainly," admitted John, having a vision of Lady Godiva in a Rolls-Royce, but allowing something for exaggeration.

"She was still out when I came home from the Bridge Club," said Lady Ide. "'Is Miss Cynthia in bed?' I asked the second

footman. 'Not in this house, your ladyship,' he answered. 'She's out motoring with Mr. Hyde.' 'Thank you, James,' I said, 'and kindly be a little more careful of your tongue or a week's wages for you, young man.' Not that he meant anything, I'm sure."

"I'd better go up," said John.

Lady Ide ignored this suggestion for a moment.

"These young people don't take any care of themselves, Doctor," she complained, grabbing for a little powder puff in her bag and making use of a mirror over the mantelpiece. "They'll risk anything for a bit of a spree. And after all who can blame them, poor darlings? I was the same myself at their age. A short life and a merry one I used to say. Well, I must say I had a merry one—and I feel as young as ever I did."

"And look it, Lady Ide," said John gallantly, having a kind heart.

She tapped him on the back of the hand with her lorgnette.

"Naughty! You're too young to remember me in my best days. Dulcie Devereux, you know and the darling of the gods. Oh, I make no secret of it! The boys used to love me, poor dears. All those war boys."

"I was one of them," said John, sincerely this time, remembering himself as a boy in Eton collars with his ears sticking out, in the third row of the stalls with Uncle Dick, and afterwards on seven days' leave.

She flashed a coy glance at him, with her head on one side like a canary.

"Dear man! . . . That's charming of you, though I don't believe a word of it. . . . Well, they were jolly old times and I wish they were back, in spite of being her ladyship, and all that. Now I must go off to that beastly Bridge club—the old cats, you know! One of the maids will show you upstairs to that wilful darling of mine."

She kissed her hand to him, stood for a moment as though the spot light were on her, and then left the room as once she had gone behind the curtain to a storm of applause.

"The eternal flapper!" thought John good-humouredly. "And why not? Better than lace caps and closed windows."

He heard the door of that Rolls-Royce outside close with a snap and the lovely swish of it as it went down the square.

"This way, Doctor," said a neat maid appearing at the door of the morning-room in which he stood smiling at the thought of that lady.

XII

CYNTHIA IDE'S bedroom overlooked the gardens, and that pale sunshine of a February afternoon came through the windows, glinting on the rosewood dressing-table and innumerable little bottles with silver tops. It was a large room with polished boards, and bright rugs, and snug chairs covered with flowered chintz, and bookshelves filled with little books leaning untidily against each other. The room was large enough to give a dance in, and quite charming.

"Hullo, Doctor!" said Cynthia. "How's Janet?"

She was sitting up in a bed of painted wood—with a scene of the Watteau School on the panel at the foot—in a rose-coloured dressing-gown showing a glimpse of humorous pyjamas of white silk and embroidered dragons with scarlet tongues.

Wonderfully attractive—these modern girls who look like boys. As slim and golden as one of those narcissi they were selling in Sloane Square.

On a table by the bedside was a silver tray laden with things that might have been breakfast or lunch—untouched so far.

"Janet's fine," answered John. "Anything wrong with you to-day?"

"A slight chill, perhaps," admitted Cynthia grudgingly. "Mother makes a wail about it. The dramatic instinct, you know!"

John smiled, thinking of Dulcie Devereux. Odd that a woman like that—just a little vulgar perhaps to put it mildly—should have mothered a girl like this as delicate and fine as a hothouse flower.

"Well," he said, "it's rather asking for trouble, isn't it? motoring from hot rooms into a February night with nothing on—according to your mother."

She laughed, and then sneezed, and then laughed again. "I was

perfectly decent, Doctor. An evening cloak covers a multitude of shins. . . . Would you like to look at my tongue at all? Doctors do that, don't they?"

No, he wasn't really interested in her tongue. He felt her forehead—rather hot—took her temperature—a point above normal—put his long fingers about her wrist—a bit jumpy that pulse—listened to her lungs through his stethoscope. The usual professional stuff which seemed to amuse her.

"Do you hear anything?" she asked inquisitively. "How's my crystal set working?"

"Nothing wrong with your lungs," he assured her. "You won't have pneumonia this time."

She had had no intention of having it, she protested. Such an idea had never entered her head.

Doctor Jevons did not argue that point. He was wondering why her pulse was a bit jumpy.

"Still if I were you I wouldn't risk that sort of thing again," he warned her. "It might mean eight weeks in bed with a hospital nurse and all sorts of fuss. Hardly worth it, is it, for a joy-ride with a boy in a boiled shirt and a black tie?"

She considered this question humorously. Certainly Dr. Jevons was more amusing than that old man in Harley Street with a bird's-nest beard.

"It depends on the boy," she answered. "And anyhow, he had a white tie and a white waistcoat with enamelled buttons. And last night he happened to be amusing—up to a point."

For a moment the smile flickered from her eyes as though he had not been amusing after that point.

"No speed limit up the Great West Road," she said, "until we did a wonderful skid which scared him a bit. Rather a good thrill as far as I was concerned."

"Are you out for thrills like that?" asked John.

"Well, it's better than boredom, isn't it?"

Boredom. Great heavens! in a world that was crammed with beauty and interest and the chance of service to people with less luck. Perhaps that was what was the matter with some of these young people, especially in places like Cadogan Square behind the railings of rich houses. They were tired with their toys. They were

sick with a surfeit of good things. They were bored because they had nothing to do worth doing.

"Yes," he said, "I quite understand. Everything is done for you, no doubt. There's nothing much you can't have if you want it—so you don't want it. The whole world tries to amuse you and fails lamentably. There's nothing really worth while for a jaded lady except a thrill with a risk in it. Is that how it goes?"

She was not quite sure that he was speaking ironically. She gave him a quick little glance with her head on one side and just for a moment looked like her mother, as her mother had looked twenty years ago.

"Thought reader!" she said with a slightly heightened colour. "How did you guess?"

Then she ducked her head under the silk counterpane—the colour of her hair—and sneezed convulsively.

"I believe I've got a bit of a chill," she remarked when she reappeared.

She stretched out her hand to the little table by her side and found a cigarette in a silver box and offered him one in return for a light.

"Oh yes, I'm a jaded lady all right," she said as though she had a revelation beneath that counterpane. "What can you expect with a life like mine? Mother's darling child since I crawled out of my cot and stood on my plump little legs. Father's pet—with other little ladies, also with golden hair, I'm afraid. Now the usual round of the New Rich. Nice, Monte Carlo, Vichy; casinos, *bals fleuris*, gala nights with fish-eyed old men and wicked old women. . . . *Thés dansants* at the Negresco with oily lounge lizards and American flappers. . . . Perhaps the Lido for a change with movie stars baking themselves brown in next-to-nothing. Then London, when Parliament is sitting, Sir Francis Ide, M.P., you know—making laws for the country—that noble man! Climbing the social ladder by feeding the New Poor, poor dears! Sir Francis and Lady Ide gave a ball last night, at their town house in Cadogan Square. Among those present——"

She raised her arms above her head and let them fall again heavily on the counterpane.

"Oh, so very boring, Doctor—except for a friend or two, like Janet, and some of the men who like me for my own sake.

Not sponging on father, I mean. Sometimes it all seems rather silly."

"Yes," agreed John. "Hardly good enough."

He reached out for a small box on her table. It contained a number of white tablets—a much advertised headache cure—which he regarded suspiciously.

"Rather dangerous," he said. "Not good for the nerves—or the heart. Why do you take them?"

He wondered again about that jumpy pulse.

"Headaches," she explained. "Sleepless nights, sometimes. Rotten dreams. Nerves. . . . Aren't they rather soothing?"

"Dope," answered John. "But they won't do the dicky birds any harm. They'll have too much sense to take them. No nerve among the London sparrows. Odd that!"

He went to the window and tilted the tablets out into the gardens below.

"A very jolly view from your window," he remarked looking out to Cadogan Square with the glint of sunlight on the bare trees and their fretwork of boughs, under a blue sky. The vista of chimney pots looked very amusing.

"I call that mean of you," said Cynthia quite crossly. "Now I shan't sleep a wink to-night."

"Far better without them," said John. "But I wonder why you have headaches, and sleepless nights, and rotten dreams, and nerves. Those things don't happen by themselves. There must be a cause for them."

"Soul sickness, Doctor," said Cynthia. "The malady of modern civilisation among those who think too much, like me."

She was smiling again and seemed amused when the doctor went to her bookcase and had a look at the things she was reading. Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Siegfried Sassoon, Galsworthy, Michael Arlen. He had read most of them.

"My dream world," she said. "I mean when I keep awake."

"They may keep you awake," he suggested. "Over exciting, perhaps. Out of touch with reality."

Wonderfully true, she thought, some of them. But certainly Aldous Huxley and others took a gloomy view of life. And some-

times they suggested ways of escape that were a trifle—well—risky perhaps for the daughter of Sir Francis Ide.

"If there's anything in heredity," she said, "my father's daughter will have to be careful. Bad blood, you know!"

It was hard on Sir Francis Ide that remark. It was the second time she had mentioned heredity as one of her handicaps. Perhaps some book she had read had put that idea into her head. These girls read extraordinary books nowadays—not too encouraging to young minds eager to find the truth of life.

"If one keeps one's mind straight——" said John.

She thought the body had an influence on the mind. Parents bequeathed their characters to their offspring, didn't they? That's why one should be so very careful to choose one's parents, poor dears.

"One can educate the will-power," said John. "One can sort one's self out and control one's instincts. It's possible to know the hidden impulses which lurk in one's subconscious mind and then by revealing them master them. At least that's the idea! Or if one can't do it oneself one can get someone else to do it. Mental experts."

"Psycho-analysis?" asked Cynthia doubtfully. "It's rather horrible, isn't it? I should hate to be stripped—my poor little naked soul—by some man with a list of questions, interpreting my foolish dreams."

"Sometimes it's helpful," suggested John rather startled by her knowledge of his special study.

"Worse than the confessional," protested Cynthia. "That's why I jibbed once when I thought of becoming a Catholic. Fancy revealing all one's naughtiness to an old gentleman behind a lattice. Quite impossible!"

"I don't suppose the old gentleman's hair would fall off—if he happened to have any," said John. "I dare say they know human nature pretty well and make allowances."

"Yes, but they don't know Cynthia Ide," said that girl with a deep and gloomy significance at which John laughed.

She thought it was no laughing matter.

"Doctor," she said presently, "tell me what shall I do to be saved. Between ourselves, I'm just a little bit afraid of myself.

I'm rather tempted sometimes to go beyond the speed limit just for the sake of adventure with a bit of a risk in it. And then I get frightened. I did last night after that skid. A sudden sense of—well—horror at myself."

"Basil Hyde?" asked John.

She nodded.

"He became rather foolish on the Great West Road. I don't care two pins for him, really. That's what made it so—beastly."

"Do you care two pins for anyone?" asked John. "Not that I have the right to ask, but it just occurred to me that if you want an adventure with a bit of a risk in it marriage might suit you all right. Babies are rather good fun, I should say. A cure for boredom and headaches and nerves."

"No," said Cynthia. "I couldn't *bear* it!"

She spoke with real decision as though her mind were quite made up on that subject.

"Always to be tied to the same man!" she exclaimed. "How frightful!—especially when he gets different from what one thought he was. Marriage is hideous, really—nowadays. Perhaps it always was, only people didn't know so much about it. As my father's daughter——"

She didn't finish that sentence but gave a bitter little laugh.

"Nobody wants you to marry your father," suggested John in his candid way.

There was some trouble here. Sir Francis Ide didn't seem to be a good advertisement of the married state. Perhaps he had done something to shock this girl's mind and make her afraid of her own natural instincts. He had read such cases in textbooks.

"You must know some decent men," he said. "And there's no alternative to marriage in an orderly state."

"Comradeship!" suggested Cynthia.

"Why not love?" asked John. "It's a passion that exists. It's rather pleasing, I'm told. The greatest adventure of all."

It didn't last she thought. A week or two, a year or two, then disillusion and beastliness. Two souls in torment. Or infidelity and divorce, and more—beastliness. She was quite sure that she would be the first to break the contract. It was in her blood. That's why she was rather afraid of herself, among other things.

She laughed suddenly—becoming self-conscious with a vivid blush.

"I'm talking as though you were my father confessor. Giving myself away too much! It's because you have such a nice bedside manner, Doctor!"

He rose and took up his hat and gloves. He would have to go, though this conversation interested him. There was something wrong with this girl he thought. Perhaps she had got into a rotten set of young modernists who despised the old conventions, talking revolt and sex stuff, and not knowing a thing about life—not the first thing as the man at the coffee stall said. It was tragic in a way, though one couldn't associate tragedy with this golden-haired beauty who looked like a daffodil or a hothouse flower.

"I'm afraid I've stayed too long," he said. "Better keep indoors for a few days."

"A little tonic, Doctor?" asked Cynthia as though reminding him of his professional duties in a friendly way.

He didn't believe in drugs. Nothing but humbug really. A cold had to cure itself, or rather the body would have to establish its own resistance. What she wanted was a moral tonic—some better object in life and less selfishness—though he wasn't going to say so. But an idea suddenly occurred to him which might be useful to another patient of his.

"By the way," he enquired, "I wonder if you would do me a good turn at some later date?"

"Pleased and honoured!" said Cynthia looking interested. "But I'm not an influential person, you know!"

"I'm not so sure," answered John.

He hesitated for a moment wondering whether this idea of his was quite professional.

"I thought perhaps—if you happened to be on speaking terms with your father—that you might put in a word for a boy I know. Is that possible?"

She seemed to think it possible. She was certainly on speaking terms with her distinguished father. In fact, he pampered her, rather distressingly, when he felt in a petting mood.

"It's a young film actor I know," said John. "Out of work

and down on his luck. An attractive lad, but a bit neurotic, perhaps. He turned on the gas the other day. Rather a bad case."

"How perfectly frightful!" cried Cynthia. "Poor little beast!"

She would certainly put in a word with her father. He might give her a chit to some film producer.

She wasn't quite so utterly selfish as he had been inclined to think. She was responding to his moral tonic rather well. It would do her a bit of good to think of somebody else for once.

"That's very charming of you," he said. "The boy's name is Eric Pardoe. My address will find him."

"I'll speak to father when I get him in a good mood," said Cynthia.

"Thanks!"

He held out his hand to say good-bye.

"You'll sleep all right to-night," he promised. "Eight hours. Keep yourself warm. No need of quack medicines!"

She sent her love to Janet.

XIII

IN the hall as John was reclaiming his gloves and hat the front door opened and the master of the house came in—judging from the sudden stiffness of the young manservant. Sir Francis Ide, obviously, as John guessed by a glance at this middle-aged man with a florid clean shaven face and slightly bloodshot eyes. He was very well dressed, judging from a waisted overcoat with a silk collar.

He stared at John good-humouredly and asked, “Who are you?”

John gave him an idea on the subject and mentioned that he had just been up to see his daughter. A slight chill.

“Not surprised,” said Sir Francis Ide. “These alarming daughters of ours don’t seem to wear any clothes nowadays. In this foul climate, too! Come into my study, won’t you?”

He did not seem to hear John’s excuse that he was rather busy—not quite true that!—and led the way to a room at the end of the hall. It was a pleasant looking room panelled in dark wood and hung round with caricatures of the sporting and political worlds. On the mantelpiece were some photographs of pretty women scrawled across with affectionate greetings to “dear old Franky” and—one—“To My Beau Ideal,” which no doubt was a pun on his name as well as a tribute to his character.

“Have a cigar,” said Sir Francis Ide, and he took one himself, a very large and costly looking one, when the doctor declined.

“Nothing more than a chill, I hope?” he asked referring to his daughter.

John said something about nerves and not sleeping quite well.

Sir Francis Ide shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

“What can you expect? Always on the go! Supper dances and night clubs. . . . Still, I can’t play the heavy father, you know.

I do a bit of that myself. A man like me has to get some relief from that damned House of Commons to say nothing of business, and all the rest of it. What a life, eh? No peace for the wicked!

He laughed again and cleared his throat of a slight huskiness.

"It's about time I did a week or two at Monte. My only chance before the General Election with all its hellishness. One gets a real change and a glimpse of the sun now and then. Not that there's much sun in the rooms where I like to play around a bit! . . . It's my wife who has the luck. No system, but the terror of the croupiers."

He puffed that cigar of his sitting back in a swing chair before a roll-top desk.

"That's a queer girl of mine—Cynthia," he remarked. "Can't make her out sometimes. She's always playing around with the boys—poor weeds some of 'em!—but doesn't seem to come up to the scratch at all. I'd like to see her married, to a good fellow. There's one of her boys who would give his head for her, and he's going to be a peer one of these days—no money, of course!—unless his uncle marries late in life and has a kid, which doesn't seem likely at fifty-nine. Young Hyde. You may have met him?"

"Yes," said John. "An interesting type."

"Well, it's a chance for Cynthia," said Sir Francis Ide. "Not too bad to be the Countess of Shere one day. And she'd live up to it too. The real style. Patrician. As haughty as hell when she likes, even with a father who always pampers her!"

He laughed good-humouredly again as though he admired his daughter's haughtiness, but just for a second John thought he saw a hint of distress in his eyes as though that laugh covered a slight unpleasantness.

"Perfectly independent nowadays, these young girls," he continued. "No good talking to them. Or to their mothers! Poor old father takes a back seat, though he makes the money to amuse them. Well, that's all right. It's the game, isn't it? I try to play the game though it's damn' difficult sometimes, and not much reward when one comes to think of it. . . ."

He sighed heavily, took a puff at his cigar and said, "Have a whiskey?"

A whiskey at three in the afternoon? Not for Dr. John

Jevons. But a double one for Sir Francis Ide, proprietor of picture palaces and one of our legislators.

"I must be going," said John.

Sir Francis Ide held out his hand, soft and well shaped.

"I won't keep you. I expect you doctors have a busy time too. And you must get to know queer things about your patients, eh? Their secret vices. The skeletons in their cupboards. Well, we all have them! That's part of the game! Glad to have met you."

So that was Cynthia's father, and the reason why she was afraid of heredity. Good-looking and good-natured, but——

John left the house in Cadogan Square with that unfinished sentence in his mind.

XIV

AS Janet had said with sound commonsense it was perfectly absurd for Dr. John Jevons to offer free food and lodging in his house to that boy who had tried to gas himself in Smith Street. But, as John had argued with himself and her, the absurd things in life are sometimes the things worth doing, and in this case, as he fully admitted, he had a bee in his bonnet about that young man because he reminded him in a startling way of a second lieutenant who had been killed in the war. They had shared the same dug-out in the trenches near St. Quentin before March of '18, and John had discovered with a sense of alarm that his junior officer had lost his nerve after a night raid in which a sergeant and three men had been blown to bits by a chance shell. He discovered it quite suddenly one night when the boy began to tremble as though he had the ague when the enemy put over some barrage fire—nothing very much—and he refused to leave the dug-out with a message from John to battalion headquarters. There had been a painful scene. It was a clear case of shell-shock which generals, not subject to such breakdowns in comfortable châteaux behind the firing lines, were apt to call bloody cowardice. John put his arm round the boy while he wept and trembled, and at last coaxed him into self-control when he was desperately ashamed of himself.

“For Christ’s sake don’t give me away,” he implored. “My father’s name——”

It was one of the historic names of England, and there would have been a nasty blot on it if this boy had been shot for cowardice in face of the enemy. John didn’t give him away, but watched him with lynx eyes and propped him up when things were unpleasant, and helped him to dodge certain duties which might have revealed his secret. The boy had a pathetic gratitude for this friendship, and rewarded it on March 21st by holding on to a

machine-gun post until he was hit in the stomach by a bit of shell. There was a dog-like look in his eyes before they glazed. . . .

Eric Pardoe was remarkably like him, with the same delicate features—finely cut—and the same look of being too sensitive for the rough and tumble of life. It was partly for this reminder of a dead boy that John offered him a bedroom in Walpole Street while he was looking for a job.

He came round one morning with a bag into which he had slung his clothes and things—his wrist-watch and other belongings still remained in the pawn shop at the corner—and was shown by Mrs. Meggs into the consulting-room where John was having his third pipe over a copy of *The Times*.

"Feeling fit?" asked John cheerily.

"Not too bad."

He stood there nervously with his face slightly flushed and a faint smile.

"I don't know why I should quarter myself on you like this," he remarked in a low voice. "It seems a bit too thick, really."

"Glad to have you," said John. "Come and have a look at your room. Not much of a billet."

It was the bedroom at the top of the house. The doctor had put a writing-table into it and an arm-chair and a few books. He noticed that Janet had put some flowers in a vase before going to the hat shop and he was pleased with this little sign of goodwill after her somewhat heated objections to their new lodger. She had been fussed about it in a way that was unusual to her as though she anticipated trouble of some kind.

"Your room," said John. "You can come and go just as you like. No need to be sociable if you don't feel like it, except at meal times. Some of those books aren't bad."

Eric Pardoe had a look at the books, and didn't seem attracted by them.

"Conrad," he remarked. "Rather old-fashioned now, isn't he?"

"Immortal," said John, rather hipped about that, having an almost religious respect for anything that Conrad had ever written.

The boy glanced round the room with a slight smile and then went to the window and looked out.

"Not much of a view," said John, "but you will get a glimpse now and then of some pretty girls at that training college."

"Oh, flappers!" answered Eric Pardoe as though he had no use for them.

"Well, I hope you'll make yourself at home," said John. "Lunch at one o'clock when I'll introduce you to my sister."

He left his lodger standing in the bedroom with his hands in the pockets of his shabby overcoat. The boy was not overwhelming in his thanks but that was the way of the younger crowd perhaps. It didn't mean that they weren't grateful for small services like this. They didn't gush, that's all. At lunch time Janet came in and young Pardoe strolled down, standing out in the hall until John called to him.

"My sister Janet," said John.

"How do you do."

The boy was polite but cold.

Janet held out her hand and John saw the inevitable flutter of her eyelashes—that sign of shyness.

"Liver and bacon for lunch," she said. "I hope you don't hate it."

"Not in the least."

He was perfectly self-possessed, or at least masked any shyness he may have felt, but not talkative though Janet tried to draw him out once or twice. He had been sent down from Oxford, he confessed without any excuse on the subject beyond a reference to "ridiculous Dons." He had played a few minor parts in the "movies." Very boring on the whole. It meant hanging about such a lot. Lately there had been a slump in English movies. And no wonder considering the muck they produced.

Yes, he knew a few people in town. Balliol men who had come down. Some of his people's friends—very stuffy.

Once or twice John saw him glancing at Janet as though summing her up according to some secret standard of his own, and once he saw Janet steal a glance back at him with an almost imperceptible smile. He wondered how they sized each other up. It would be awkward if Janet took an active dislike to the boy.

"I'd better wander around a bit this afternoon and see if there's anything doing," said young Pardoe.

"Not a bad idea," John agreed cordially.

"Not that things are likely to have changed much—since——"

He failed to finish his sentence and his face flushed suddenly. He meant since that night when he had turned on the gas in his bedroom.

Then he finished the sentence as though he refused to shirk it.

"Since I tried to do myself in."

He glanced at Janet as he spoke, but she looked the other way interested in some bulbs that were growing in small pots on a table by the window.

"Very spring like, those bulbs," she remarked hurriedly, and then discoursed a little about a play she had seen last night. Quite a good show, but rather brainless.

"Fond of the theatre?" she asked Mr. Eric Pardoe.

It bored him to stand in queues outside the pit. He would rather not go unless he could do it well, which hadn't been possible lately.

"Oh, I think it's fun standing in queues," said Janet. "One enjoys a good thing much better after earning it."

"That sounds like moral philosophy," answered young Pardoe, with a slight touch of satire and the flicker of a smile.

"It is," admitted Janet sturdily.

She had to go to her hat shop, and kissed her hand to John, with just a nod to the new lodger.

John had to go out, too, but he had time for a pipe and a chat with this boy. It wasn't easy to draw him out at all, but that was natural at first. He would open up before long and reveal himself. The doctor felt a little nervous about asking something he wanted to know, just to put the boy straight until he could get a job again.

"Have you any petty cash to go on with, Pardoe? . . . I mean for buses and baccy and so on."

The boy pulled some coppers out of his trouser's pocket and eyed them a moment, with a slightly humorous interest.

"Fourpence he'penny, to be exact. I thought of visiting that useful establishment at the corner with a pair of cuff-links. I don't want to write to my austere parent."

"That's all right," said John carelessly. "If a quid or two would be of any use—until you get rich enough to pay me back——"

He handed over a couple of notes, and after a moment's

hesitation the boy took them and slipped them into his waistcoat pocket.

"Very decent of you," he observed. "But I'm afraid you're rather over optimistic about that future wealth of mine."

John thought the security was pretty good. Cynthia was going to extract an introduction from her father to one of the big film producers, and it was quite on the cards that this good-looking boy would be earning a decent salary before long.

That evening the boy was late for supper at seven-thirty, and John had a word or two with Janet before he arrived.

"What do you think of the lad?"

Janet's eyelashes fluttered.

"As far as his looks go he puts back the clock ten years or more. All those boys in khaki!"

"Yes," said John, thinking of that young officer who had shared his dug-out.

"Without the same spirit," Janet added. "Neurotic and self-centred. Not a sign of gratitude for what you're doing for him, Jacko."

"Oh, I rather like his touch of arrogance," said John. "It shows character."

He was amused rather than surprised when the boy drove up that evening in a taxi for which he paid with John's money.

"Sorry to be late," he said, appearing at the supper table. "I got lost in the wilds of Cricklewood. . . . Nothing doing, of course."

"Took a taxi back?" asked Janet casually.

"Yes, the rush hour, you know. Rather shattering to the nerves, don't you think?"

"I often risk it," answered Janet with her dark irony.

After dinner young Pardoe retired to his room and later went for a walk, and John, who was reading a war novel by a man named Mottram, was aware that his sister was unusually restless. Once glancing up from his book he saw her sitting in the low chair on the other side of the fireplace with a look of melancholy in her eyes which stared over his head at some vision beyond the room.

"Hipped about something?" he asked.

Her face flushed and she became busy with a bit of needlework.

"I wish you hadn't asked that boy here," she said irritably.

"Why?" asked John.

She bent her head over the needlework and shrugged her shoulders slightly. "It's rather worrying in a way. We shall have to keep him amused, I suppose. We don't want him to turn the gas on upstairs, just because he's bored."

"Oh, no chance of that," said John. "He'll be all right when he gets a job."

XV

JOHN called again to enquire how Cynthia's chill was getting on, and she seemed glad to see him and looked brighter.

"You're a miracle worker, Doctor," she told him. "I slept without a wink last night. Eight hours."

Wonderful is the power of suggestion, thought John, though he knew that it didn't always work as well as that.

She had a funny dream, she told him, during that eight hours' sleep, or rather at the end of it. As a matter of fact she had had it several times before. It was one of her rotten dreams, and really very queer.

"Would you like to tell me?" asked John.

She was just a little doubtful about telling him. Wasn't there a man named Freud who got people to tell him their dreams and then made up nasty ideas about them?

John agreed that there was such a man, and he thought it was a pity that his stuff had become popularised so that there were jokes about it in the music halls. Personally he wasn't a Freudian. On the contrary, he was very hostile to the Freudian philosophy of life, though undoubtedly the old bird had revealed a good deal about the unconscious mind.

"You needn't tell me that dream unless you want to," he added.

There was nothing in it, really. Just an odd dream, often occurring, that she was being pursued by something. Chased! Man, beast or devil, she didn't know. But she wanted to *escape*. That was the chief point. She was frightened, and wanted to get away to some place of safety. It was perfectly absurd how frightened she was in her dream and the idiotic places to which she ran for safety. Sometimes it was the inside of a picture palace, in the darkness there, where that Thing couldn't follow her! And once it was a church with lighted candles and the figure of the baby Jesus

on the altar. And once it was the wardrobe where she kept her frocks. But last night she was in a motor-car, driving herself, with that fear behind her, and with Basil Hyde—she was almost sure it was Basil—sitting by her side. She drove faster and faster with that fear coming close. She kept stamping on the accelerator to get more speed, but could never go fast enough to get away from the thing that was trying to catch her up. She woke up—howling!—just as she had overturned the car and pitched Basil into the ditch—it was almost certainly Basil—and found herself somehow—how absurd dreams are!—in John's consulting room—that room where they had all sat on the night of the fog with the Blakes and the Ziborovas.

"Rather interesting," said John. "It's quite a common dream really—that desire to escape. Nothing to worry about."

"What does it mean?" asked Cynthia curiously. "That is if it isn't too appalling."

John didn't seem to think it was appalling. It was perfectly simple, really, he thought. It was just some little childish fear—some timidity of girlhood—which she had tried to repress and hid away, because it seemed so silly, or because she was afraid of telling people like her mother or nurse. Probably she had told them, and they had laughed at her, or told her not to be a foolish child, or had been angry with her. So she had tucked away the little fear in some secret cupboard of her mind, but all the time it was trying to get out of the cupboard, and in her sleep, when the controls of will and imagination were less in command, it sneaked out and had a high old time in the dream world.

So he explained it, but Cynthia didn't seem to think much of his explanation.

"There's more in it than that," she said. "It's something rather vital. Something I don't want to do, or *do* want to do. I can't make it out. It seems frightfully important in my dream as though all my life depended on it."

"Well, one day we might have a look into that secret cupboard, suggested John cheerfully. "Sometimes it's difficult to find the key."

That was all about the dream, but Cynthia had been in touch with reality and produced the proof of it in a sheet of note-paper

signed by her father. It was addressed to a certain Captain Braithwaite of a motion-picture studio at Highgate.

"Dear Jumbo,

Kindly give the bearer of this note—Mr. Eric Pardoe—any small part you may have in your next production.

*Love to Ladybird,
Francis Ide."*

"That's the best I can do for your little orphan boy," said Cynthia. "Father was a bit sticky about it."

"Good enough!" exclaimed John pocketing this precious bit of paper. "And a thousand thanks to a Girl Guide. One good deed a day. That's the way to cure sleeplessness."

Perhaps it was rather unprofessional of him to kiss her hand when he said good-bye, but she held it up to him as though she expected it, like a princess in a fairy tale, or Nina Ziborova. And it was curious that when he found himself in Cadogan Square after safely passing that supercilious young footman who eyed his old hat with disgust—confound his insolence!—he had a sense of something having happened to him—a kind of elation, a more intense awareness of life's beauty and of his own responsiveness, so that the twitter of birds in the bushes behind the railings seemed louder, and the sunlight on the tall red houses had a mystical effect in this respectable square changing it to "a rose red city half as old as time," and the whistling of an errand boy made him think of Pan playing on his pipes in a wood of Arcady.

"Hullo!" said Dr. Jevons, "what's the matter with me? I hope I'm not sickening for anything."

There was a marriage reception at the corner house—a large mansion of red brick, with the striped awning up and the red carpet down. A small crowd of girls and nursemaids and press photographers were waiting to see the bride, and Police Constable Widgery was there on duty.

He saluted John who stopped for a moment with smiling eyes.

"Great doings!" said John.

Police Constable Widgery answered behind his hand with a slight wink:

“More work for the divorce courts, Doctor! These smart weddings, eh? Make one think a bit on one’s beat.”

John smiled and passed on. Too cynical that! There were still some happy marriages. Thousands of them. One of these days——

“Great Jupiter!” exclaimed Dr. Jevons as he turned into the King’s Road. “I suppose it’s the breath of spring that makes me feel so very odd. What’s the meaning of these ridiculous day-dreams at my time of life?”

XVI

THE single sheet of paper signed by Sir Francis Ide worked the trick all right for that boy Eric Pardoe. He seemed to know the name of Captain Braithwaite and said that he was a "Big Bug" in the movie world.

"Produces the most horrible filth, of course," he added, "but then they all do that."

Being a pessimist he was quite sure that he would be turned down. Still he might as well slope off to Highgate and present the chit. He sloped off, after breakfast, looking profoundly miserable and utterly hopeless, especially as Janet had advised him to go by Tube in spite of its nerve shattering effects upon his delicate sensibilities. (She was beginning to chip him a little.) But that night he came back by taxi and justified the expense by reporting that he had been given a crowd job in a new production called *The Passions of Pamela*. One quid a day while the show lasted, and it might take three months.

"A quid a day!" exclaimed John amazed by this generosity of payment. "Lord, I wish I could earn as much by doctoring."

"Oh, it's the usual wage," said young Pardoe. "And, of course, they're all nigger drivers. Long hours, endless hanging about, blasphemous abuse from the man with the megaphone, stone-cold dressing-rooms, and nothing to do half the time but smoke cigarettes until they make one sick."

"Better than nothing a day," remarked Janet. "Don't you ever thank your stars for a bit of luck?"

"Oh, I'm not grouching," he protested, though his previous speech had suggested something of the kind, as Janet observed with a sideways smile at him.

A curious boy! John watched him closely, but could not size him up. He was extremely casual in many ways—almost ill-mannered sometimes—and yet there was a charm about him,

especially when his face lighted up with a smile at Janet's leg-pulling. It never occurred to him to give up a comfortable arm-chair when John came into his own room and Janet happened to be in the only other chair which might be called "easy." Yet he seemed to be grateful for John's friendship—or at least went as far as to tell Janet that he thought her brother passed the speed limit as an idealist. Seeing that Janet was fond of flowers—she had a passion for them—he brought her in an armful of narcissi from the lady at the war memorial in Sloane Square out of his first week's salary. Quite generous of him and rewarded by a cry of delight from Janet and then by a laughing rebuke at his wanton extravagance. But he did not offer to pay back that two pounds which John had lent him for petty cash, or other money which John had paid out to Mrs. Murphy in Smith Street to settle up outstanding debts.

Surely he's going to pay up? thought John, who was careless of money matters, but interested in this loan as a test of young Pardoe's character.

Not at all! Two weeks passed and Eric Pardoe who was earning a pound a day made no reference to financial liabilities. But he bought three stalls at the Garrick Theatre for a play which he thought Janet and the doctor would like to see—and that must have made a nasty hole in a week's salary, of the amount mentioned. Not a word about paying for his board and lodging!

He was out all day, and often home long after supper-time so Janet had to keep things hot for him, because Mrs. Meggs liked her evenings out as much as possible having a daughter in service at a house in Eton Place where the butler turned on the wireless in the servants' hall, Mrs. Meggs being fond of music and a little fun now and then. That arrival after supper was a nuisance, but excusable. It was less excusable that young Pardoe should stroll down to breakfast half an hour late and generally in his dressing-gown. It was a point upon which John decided to make a protest.

"Sorry, old man, but do you mind making a mental note of the breakfast hour? Eight-forty-five."

Eric Pardoe glanced over the *Daily Express*—John rather wanted to read it—and raised his eyebrows with a slight smile.

"Military discipline?"

"Just discipline," said John. "I'm not keen on slackness. I'd also prefer you to come down dressed, if you don't mind. It's only a fidget of mine."

Eric Pardoe's face coloured slightly behind the *Express*.

"Just as you like," he agreed carelessly, and certainly for two mornings he was down within ten minutes of eight-forty-five, and afterwards, now and then. When not so punctual he smiled charmingly at John and said "Sorry!" before reaching out for the morning egg.

Once or twice when they were alone together after supper, if Janet had gone out to see some of her friends, John tried to have a heart-to-heart talk with the boy. What were his ideas on life, he wondered, now that he had recovered from that act of despair. What was his ambition? What sort of home life had he had? Why had he "chucked" Oxford? What faith, idealism, philosophy or hope was going to replace that breakdown which had made him turn on the gas one night?

It was difficult to get him to reveal himself on points like that. And yet he talked freely enough now and then, generally curled up on the hearth rug before the fire or sitting on a foot-stool with his hands clasped round his knees and a pipe in his mouth.

He had hated that public school of his and everything to do with it.

A rotten system, in his opinion.

"Why?" asked John who had been to Winchester and liked it on the whole.

Too rigid, he thought. A lot of louts all forced into the same mould, and hell for those who tried to break out. He had been flogged publicly for something he hadn't done. That was during his first year. It didn't tend to make him love the place. Blast them!

He spoke those last two words with real bitterness. That injustice—if it was injustice—rankled with him still.

Then there were compulsory games. Why the hell should games be compulsory? As it happened, he was keen on reading—oh, nothing high-brow!—and loathed games, especially football on raw days with the bigger louts hacking his shins.

"I'm against this worship of sport," he remarked, knocking

his pipe out against the firegrate. " "It produces such noble characters—it teaches fair play"—and all that tosh. Oh, God. Look at the portraits of our leading pugilists and our professional athletes! Frightening! "

He laughed at the mental image of those faces.

Then the food had been pretty poor during war-time which he vaguely remembered as a period when most of his class boasted of fathers and brothers who had been killed somewhere or other—he couldn't remember the name of that river in France—oh Lord, yes—the Somme! They were frightened at night because they dreamt of Germans and air raids and were still more frightened later on when they began to realise that their time would come to join the jolly old massacre—though, of course, they pretended they were mad keen to join up. *Dulce et decorum est*—yes, it all came back to him now. The headmaster used to make patriotic orations to his blue nosed brats—the most frightful bilge about the glory of dying for something or other which had rather escaped his mind.

"England, perhaps," suggested John who hated the war, and all war, but somehow was annoyed when this boy threw such scorn on those four years of sacrifice. And yet perhaps he was right. What had the war done for England? . . . That million and a half of unemployed men. . . . The waste of the splendour of youth . . . the untold misery. Could the damn thing have been avoided, with any honour? Even now he wasn't sure.

"What about Oxford?" asked John.

"Oh, Oxford! "

Eric Pardoe shrugged his shoulders and laughed ironically.

"Suitable for half-wits and half-Blues. Or æsthetes and hearties. Very pleasant architecture, and some nice tea shops."

On the subject of women he was uncommunicative to John who asked one or two casual questions to discover this boy's ideas on the emotional side of life, but he had a talk one day to Janet about love and ladies. An amazingly frank talk, sitting as usual close to the fire with his knees up and a pipe between his teeth. It appeared that he had had a nasty jolt from a girl in West Kensington whom he had met up at the film studio where she did a bit of work. He had taken her about here and there, before he lost his job, and had spent quite a little money on her.

"She had a wonderful appetite," he remarked reminiscently.

Oh yes, she was damn' pretty—like a photograph by Neame—very soulful with dreamy eyes and fluffy hair. She liked to be kissed and he had taken advantage of the fact outside her mother's house when he took her home after a supper dance, and inside taxis, and once in the middle of Trafalgar Square in broad daylight with the buses going by. It had rotted him all ends up. It had made his heart jump in a wonky sort of way so that he thought he had some horrible disease. Once he had fainted in a tea shop in the Fulham Road to the consternation of the waitresses. At night he was afraid to go to bed, almost, because he couldn't sleep and was the victim of ridiculous emotions. "Flaming youth" and all that muck! Joyce—that was the little beast's name—had put her fingers through his hair and called him her dream lover. So very soulful! Then one day she had sent him a note to say that she was extremely sorry and all that, but she was going to get married to a gentleman who dressed the wax models in the windows of Harrod's and had a nice little house at Tufnell Park. She hoped Eric would often go to see them.

"Nasty little creature," said Janet indignantly.

"Oh, I don't know," remarked young Pardoe, sucking an empty pipe. "Looking back on it I see she was quite right. A case of self-preservation. She liked to be kissed, but it's safer if there's a nice little house in Tufnell Park for any consequences that may ensue."

He spoke calmly with smiling lips, but a moment later said something very bitter.

"Sex is hell, don't you think?"

Janet was thoughtful for a minute staring into the fire with her hand shielding its flames from her face.

"Sometimes," she agreed. "But it's life, too."

She was silent again, thinking out this question of life, so tremendous, so distressing, so utterly unsolved.

"You had bad luck," she said. "There are a lot of nice girls—wonderfully straight and loyal. One can't go through life without love. Or if one does one misses the best of it."

"Love! . . . Oh, God!"

Eric Pardoe spoke as though he had finished with love and hated

the name of it—that passion which had made his heart go “wonky,” that emotional falsity which was the raw material of the movies in which he played a minor part.

It was after that conversation—not reported—that John raised the question of this boy being shifted to a lodging of his own now that he could afford to pay for one.

“I don’t want to boot him out,” said John, “especially as I like the lad in spite of all his oddities and that casual way of his. But I know you find him a nuisance, Janet, and anyhow he ought to stand on his own now. What about a notice to quit?”

Janet was very good-natured about it and proposed a postponement of that notice.

“He’s still very neurotic, John. I think you ought to keep an eye on him for some time and anyhow we don’t want the spare bedroom. . . . Of course, he ought to pay something.”

It was arranged that he should pay two guineas a week for board and lodging. It would help towards the working expenses of a Morris-Oxford.

XVII

THAT Morris-Oxford made a nasty hole in the working capital of John Jevons, M.D., but was useful and necessary when life began to look busy for him.

He stabled it in Pavilion Road—a mile long alley (or almost that) cutting between Sloane Square and Knightsbridge where once the inhabitants of this neighbourhood kept their carriages, and where many ostlers swished water over wheels, and hissed noisily, and blasphemed cheerily as they groomed the well-fed hacks of the nobility and gentry of Victoria's golden days—a policeman's whistle away from foul slums never entered by that self-righteous generation. Now the loose boxes had been turned into garages and lock-ups for Rolls-Royces and less distinguished cars, and the ostlers (who were blood relations of Sam Weller) had given way to sharp-faced chauffeurs who oiled their engines and inflated tyres, and screwed on nuts, to the music of gramophones from rooms upstairs where they kept their families in close quarters.

Friendly fellows they were, as John found, ready to lend a hand when he got into trouble with his new machine (before he had psycho-analysed it) and pleased to have a yarn with him now and then, especially when word was passed along that he had been one of them in the bleeding old trenches in a war to which some of them looked back with humorous regret as the great adventure of life, unpleasant at the time but not without its comic side and other compensations. Now, as one of them remarked—that was Henry Wilkins, chauffeur to Lady Ide—there was a missus and four kids to worry about, and driving in London wasn't all jam, what with the police in their white armlets—thought no end of themselves—and pedestrians who believed the bleeding roads belonged to them, and lady drivers who ought to be put away instead of allowed out in London streets.

John found some patients among them, not profitable but

good for practice. Their wives had babies above the garages according to some arithmetical law of London life—the smaller the space the bigger the family. One of these chauffeurs employed by that little lady at the Lyric, Hammersmith, who had come to John's house one night required first-aid after a smash-up in Knightsbridge. He had just been able to drive back to Pavilion Road when he collapsed outside his garage, next to John's lock-up. No injury but a shock to the nervous system of a young man who had had his licence endorsed three times and was afraid of losing his job.

It was odd how patients kept cropping up, by accident or some link in the chain of coincidence. That little lady at the Lyric—Miss Joan Wittington—thanked him one morning for attending to Smith and a week later sent for him to her flat in the Clock House, Chelsea Embankment, overlooking the river and those tugs which reminded John of the grey sea he had hated. She had lost her voice and desired to find it again urgently for a first night on Friday.

"I can't speak a word!" she gasped, though as a matter of fact she spoke those words in a hoarse whisper while she held her throat. "I'm panic stricken!"

There was nothing whatever the matter with her throat. Not even a cold. No touch of tonsilitis. Just nerves, and overwork at rehearsals and late suppers after rehearsals, and scrappy meals at odd times, and an anticipation of stage-fright which had happened once before so she was scared it would happen again. Sheer imagination, and therefore worse than physical reality, or at least producing the same symptoms.

The doctor felt her throat, had a look at her tonsils again, inquired about her way of life and wrote out a prescription for a gargle as harmless as dill water.

"Take that three times and your voice will be as good as gold," he said. "And put that book of yours on one side. I want you to sleep as long as you can—until midday to-morrow, if possible."

"I *can't* sleep, Doctor, I'm worried about my words."

So she whispered and there was a look of anguish in her eyes.

"You'll sleep all right as soon as I've gone," he assured her.

"I can see that you're just ready to drop off. And the words are

all there in your subconscious mind. You will go on learning them in that sleep which is going to stop you from worrying. It's an infallible method."

He strolled to the window of that high flat in the Clock House with its oriel windows and latticed casements overlooking the river.

"That's a wonderful view you have. What a subject for an etching!"

She was much obliged to him because her voice came back and because she slept very well and didn't "fluff" her words, as they say, on the first night. It was suggestion again—sheer bluff—conveyed without the flicker of an eyelid by a doctor who looked honest in spite of his humorous eyebrows. Two stalls came with grateful regards from Joan Wittington. It was a charming play and very well acted according to Janet who took Eric Pardoe.

XVIII

PERHAPS it was Joan Wittington who passed the word along about a doctor in Walpole Street to a girl who played in the orchestra of that picture palace in the King's Road advertised as Cute, Comfy and Cosy. You never can tell how these things happen to a general practitioner. She was a girl with red hair—like one of Rossetti's ladies—who played the 'cello and kept an invalid mother in rooms over a ham-and-beef shop in the King's Road. Now she had neuritis in her left hand, so that she couldn't play.

"Anything worrying you?" asked John after the usual professional questions.

No, there was nothing very special worrying her, she thought, except the difficulty of making both ends meet and the long hours and—well—a silly idea that kept coming to her in the cinema when the lights were switched off. It was an idiotic idea, too absurd to mention really. She laughed at the absurdity of it, but there was a worried look in her pale blue eyes. She had an idea—she hoped the doctor wouldn't jeer at her too much!—that the picture palace was going to catch on fire and that she was going to be trampled to death in a rush to the exits. It was when people began to smoke cigarettes. Sometimes this sense of fire was so strong that she had the greatest difficulty in keeping her place in the orchestra. She wanted to run out in a panic. Once she had actually risen from her seat, startling the conductor. Silly wasn't it?—and now she had this neuritis, which put her left hand out of action.

"Were you ever burnt as a child?" asked John.

No, she couldn't remember being burnt. . . . But suddenly her mother remembered.

"Yes, my dear. It was when you couldn't have been older than two, at the most. I remember distinctly. Your father had dropped a spark from his cigarette when he bent over you to say good-night

—before he left the room and turned out the gas. It burnt a hole in your cot-cover and a few minutes later we heard you screaming and your father dashed in just in time to save you from being scorched—or worse than that, though I hardly like to think of such a thing.”

The red-haired girl laughed at this story of babyhood.

“I haven’t the least recollection of it! And anyhow what has it got to do with the picture palace and that foolish idea of mine and this pain in my left arm?”

“Everything to do with it,” explained John. “It’s the cause of your neuritis and that fear you have. Your father turned off the gas and left you in the dark after that spark fell from his cigarette. That memory has been lurking in your subconscious mind. It is called up from the depths by the smell of cigarette smoke and that darkness when the lights are switched off. Well, that’s an easy one. You might have given me something more difficult than that! . . . Good morning.”

“Do you mean to say——” asked the red-haired girl.

John laughed at her.

She raised her arm, and gave a cry of surprise.

“I believe my pain has gone. . . . How extraordinary!”

“Not at all,” said John. “The mind put the pain there and the mind has taken it away. Perfectly simple. . . . Well, I must be going.”

XIX

ONE patient led to another, not in a rush but enough to keep him busy. There was that elderly dame in Sloane Court—a new block of flats facing the gardens in Sloane Street and nicely done by the architect, in keeping with the old houses of rose coloured brick. The elderly dame—Lady Liveredge—had a maid who was sister to a chauffeur in Pavilion Road whose wife had had a baby. A rather remote introduction to Lady Liveredge, but enough to set the telephone bell ringing one night when John was settling down to a novel he was reading, after a game of cards with Janet and young Pardoe—who had won three shillings off him. It appeared, over the telephone, that Lady Liveredge was choking to death having swallowed a false tooth which had stuck in her throat. Would Doctor Jevons come immediately for the love of God?

About one minute's drive in the Morris-Oxford, not yet put away for the night and wasting its lamps outside. But the poor lady was almost black in the face when he arrived and the sister of the chauffeur whose wife had had a baby was almost hysterical.

Hell's bells! thought John who used nautical language in moments of crisis.

Then he laughed good-naturedly, not at all vexed at having been put off the last chapter of a novel by a writer whose neck he would like to wring—theoretically.

"Your tooth, I believe, Lady Liveredge."

It lay in her jewel box among her pearls on the dressing-table near the couch where she had collapsed, choking horribly.

Lady Liveredge sat up, still gasping, but greatly relieved. She was in her evening gown—rather a knock-out, thought John, struck by its magnificence of black and silver.

"Well, now," she exclaimed, "I could have sworn I swallowed

it. . . . I felt it in my throat. . . . How very clever of you, Doctor! And how very absurd of me!"

She had a sense of humour and laughed until the tears came into her eyes. And John laughed quite good-humouredly, and the little maid, who had been nearly hysterical, was now quite hysterical because of this absurd mistake. Fancy putting it in the jewel box with the pearl necklace.

John stayed for twenty minutes or so. Lady Liveredge was the widow of a General who, as John remembered, had been the very devil of a fellow for night raids to keep up the morale of his division and increase the list of casualties. But that wasn't her fault and she was a cheery old thing with ideas about life and a grudge against the modern young man.

"No guts," she said. "Can't keep pace with the girls, Doctor. I can't think what's going to happen to this poor old country. Petticoat government? Well, it can't be that because women don't wear petticoats nowadays. But everything's upside down."

"Now don't go spreading the tale about this false tooth of mine, young man," she said, tapping him on the arm. "I don't want to be made the laughing stock of all my nephews and nieces and their grown-up brats!"

"Doctors never talk about their patients," John assured her gravely.

"Oh, don't they? You can't make me believe that. Harley Street is the hotbed of scandal, my dear, and I've lived long enough to know it. But one good turn deserves another and if you hold your tongue about that tusk of mine I'll recommend you to some of my relations. They're all neurotic and suffer from every imaginary disease."

"That's very charming of you," said John, envisaging a growing practice in high circles.

"They might do you a bit of good," added the old lady. "One of them is in the Cabinet, and if you could provide him with a new set of brains you'd be helping this unfortunate country of ours."

XX

A FRIENDLY old dame. Perhaps it was she who recommended him to an elderly peer who lived in a tall, narrow, red-faced house very much like himself in Hans Place, which is surely the pleasantest square in London, except that it's round. He had fallen down his front step and sprained his ankle and was in a furious rage with his usual doctor who had gone off to the Riviera for three weeks.

"I can't afford to go to the Riviera for three weeks," said this tall, narrow, red-faced gentleman. "The Government has crippled me with income tax for their damned wastefulness and the only people who make money nowadays are tradespeople and charlatans."

"Then I'm afraid I shall never make money," answered John cheerfully. "Now then, let's have a look at this ankle."

"Blast you, sir!" said the old gentleman when John had a look at it. But that was merely a temporary explosion due to a physical twinge. Afterwards he discoursed very pleasantly on Dutch art of which he had some good examples.

"Of course, I shall have to sell them," he explained. "Some confounded American, I suppose. They'll go to pay my death duties when I peg out and pass on a good old title to a young fellow who is farming in Australia. What's the good of titles nowadays? The aristocracy is an anachronism, without power or privilege. The whole world is democratized and precious soon we shall have a Labour Government with ex-miners as Cabinet Ministers. Well, I dare say they'll not make a worse job of it than the present crowd. God damn you, sir!"

That was when his new doctor was strapping up the sprained ankle.

Afterwards he apologised for his language, and insisted upon the doctor having a glass of dry sherry and a biscuit.

"There will always be an intellectual aristocracy," he argued.

“Not even a Labour Government can standardise brains. That’s one comfort. They can’t rob me of my right to read Horace.”

One of the old sort, passing now even from Hans Place and Eton Square, but lingering on like old ghosts here and there in a world that has no place for them, though in their time they ruled England, and built up its Empire, and commanded its wars, and were Roman in their ideals of duty and discipline. As generals in modern warfare, machine made, and highly scientific, they had not been brilliant. As a battalion officer in the trenches John had loathed their type, with blasphemous abuse, which now he knew to be unfair. They had done their best in an Armageddon which had gone beyond their textbooks.

XXI

JOHN was not quite certain who had called him to a bed-sitting-room in the slum end of Draycott Place where a young man stood handcuffed between two detectives while his wife—a fluffy haired young woman—was having a bad attack of hysterics on the floor. Perhaps it was Police Constable Widgery who had sent round a small boy with an urgent message.

“Christ!” said the handcuffed young man. “What was the need to go and tell her so sudden? I’ve kept straight since I married her and now you’ve gone and killed her, you swine.”

“Sorry for your wife, Jones,” said one of the detectives, “but you’d better keep a civil tongue in your mouth. She’s not going to die now the doctor’s come, so we’d best slip away. . . . Now then, none of that!”

The handcuffed man struggled to get near his wife.

“Curse you! It’s the last time I’ll see her for seven years. Haven’t you any decent feeling, you dirty——”

“Now, come along.”

He went along while Dr. Jevons dealt with a screaming girl married six weeks to an ex-convict whose manners had been very pleasant when she met him at a dancing hall. An expert mechanic and quite a gentleman, with soft eyes and a pleasant tongue.

XXII

THEN there was a patient in Beauchamp Place, with little stone steps up to little front doors, where ladies of title and others set up fancy shops and beauty parlours at a high rental which takes a lot of merchandise—a very extensive clientèle—to pay before the profits begin. John walked that way sometimes after breakfast, past Harrod's along the Brompton Road where the window dressers were rigging up the lovely ladies with waxen faces behind the blinds, and back again through Hans Place to keep himself fit. In Beauchamp Place, behind the plate-glass windows, were girls like Cynthia—her type—arranging things for the day's work and looking as fresh as paint at nine o'clock after dancing or theatre going, he guessed, until late hours. They had wonderful vitality and any amount of pluck and bright eyes that smiled at him sometimes through the window-panes because of something friendly in his glance.

One of them had fainted in the back shop after coming back from lunch. It was one of Janet's friends—Margaret Murston—who owned the shop and rang up Dr. Jevons as soon as the child had flopped like that.

"Kitty seemed perfectly well five minutes ago," said Margaret Murston when John arrived. "Then suddenly she went as white as a sheet and fell in a heap."

"Went for a walk without having lunch, perhaps," said John. "To save the price of a pair of silk stockings."

He had come across a case like that.

But it was worse than that. Kitty had taken a handbag off the counter of Harrod's in an absentminded way. She couldn't explain why she had come to take it. She hadn't wanted the beastly thing a little bit. It was the third time she had taken things she didn't want—hiding them in her bedroom at home. She was getting frightened about it, when she remembered. Her father was a

clergyman at Lewisham and would be brokenhearted if she were found out. She lived in terror of being found out—but she was even more frightened of doing it again. . . . So she sobbed out her story in the back parlour. Quite a nice child, really, but with the exhibition complex rather strong, due to a childish resentment of being kept in shabby frocks when her elder sister was spoilt by her mother. That at least was John's theory after investigation. Anyhow he was sorry for this sobbing child and put things right with Harrod's, and had a talk with that mother at Lewisham.

Kitty was cured by kindness. In the old days—not so long ago—she would have been hanged outside Newgate with other felons. We are more pitiful. Perhaps, after all, that is the only advance we have made.

XXIII

THAT dramatist and literary man Gilbert Blake, who had been at John's house on the night of the fog some time ago, desired a visit from the doctor.

John had been expecting a call from this direction. Several times lately he had met "Smudge," as Janet called him, striding about Chelsea with a haunted look, as though he walked with ghosts. Once John passed him on the Embankment opposite Swan Walk. He was standing rather rigidly, as though lost to the world, staring into the leaden-looking tide.

Thinking out a plot, John guessed, as he passed on, not caring to disturb such meditations.

Then again along the King's Road. They came face to face and their eyes met, but there was no sign of recognition from Gilbert Blake. There was a look of intense introspection in the man's eyes, and his face was stamped with the hall mark of unhappiness. He looked like a man walking through hell, though it was along the King's Road on an April morning with the sun glinting on the painted panels of buses and motor-cars and a southwest wind with a smell of spring in it frolicking down the street and flushing the cheeks of long-legged maidens.

"Something wrong with that lad," thought Dr. Jevons. "Perhaps he's thinking out a tragedy. I hope it isn't his own. Some maladjustment somewhere."

Then a note came from him in a finely pointed writing. He would be glad if Dr. Jevons would give him a look over, as he felt damned queer to put it mildly. John needn't say anything to Janet as he didn't want his wife to know. The evening would be best, at nine o'clock or so, when Lucy would be out with some of her crowd.

John went round at a quarter-past nine and Gilbert Blake opened the door of his flat.

"Oh, hullo!" he said with sham cheerfulness. "Sorry to drag you out. Infernal nonsense, really."

He led the way into the room. It was lined with books and a long refectory table with carved legs was littered with papers and magazines. John noticed a typewriter with a sheet of paper stuck in it, and three lines of script on a small table lit by a bluish lamp. On the carpet by the gas-fire lay some scrumpled bits of paper as though they had been thrown down angrily. Press cuttings, by the look of them. There was a pleasant portrait of Lucy over one of the bookcases smiling out of the canvas at this haggard husband; painted before their marriage, perhaps, and before she used that lip-stick so heavily.

"Writing a new play?" asked John, glancing towards the typewriter.

"Three lines in eight weeks," said Gilbert Blake gloomily.

"I see you had a novel out the other day."

Blake laughed rather harshly and kicked one of those scrumpled bits of paper.

"It's down-and-out. The critics have knifed it. Their general verdict is sentimental slush. My wife agrees with them."

Those last words were spoken bitterly and revealed a wound, which he tried to hide immediately by a pretence of good humour.

"They're perfectly right, of course. I quite see now that I perpetrated the most hopeless tripe. I made a mistake in imagining that I could write. I ought to be selling boots or bacon. However, I shan't worry the critics again for a long time. I haven't an idea in my head. I can't write a giddy line. I'm finished. The fact is I'm damned ill, Doctor."

He sat down suddenly in his swing chair before the typewriter and put his face into his hands, his whole body drooping into an attitude of despair.

"Let's have a squint at you," said John in that cheery way which doctors have. "In what way do you feel ill?"

"In every way," said Blake, uncovering his face which looked blanched and worn.

John laughed still more cheerily.

"That's a bit comprehensive! You can't be as bad as that unless it's general disintegration. Heart all right?"

"Quite all wrong," said Blake. "I believe it's gone cock-eyed." He described his symptoms excitedly. "Sometimes I feel giddy and faint for no reason at all. Last night I thought the game was up. I wanted to go out and post a letter but I couldn't walk a yard. I suddenly felt as though all the strength had gone out of me. I couldn't have got as far as the pillar-box for a million pounds. It scared me stiff. I felt as if I had been shell-shocked. Like nothing on earth!"

His voice broke for a minute as though he had lost control.

"Well, now," said John, "you may as well take off that coat and waistcoat."

There was nothing the matter physically with the heart of Gilbert Blake. Nothing organically wrong though a little intermittent in its beat.

"Cross your legs for a minute. So."

The doctor hit him sharply below the knee and the leg gave a jump. Quite a good reaction.

"Thank God for that!" said Blake who seemed to know that trick.

John grinned.

"Some of you laymen know too much about my line of business. Those cheap little books."

All the internal mechanism of a literary man seemed to be working quite well as far as a superficial examination could tell.

"How many cigarettes a day?" asked John.

"Anything up to sixty."

"If I were you I would cut them down to twenty. Better still, smoke an honest pipe. One doesn't inhale so much."

Gilbert Blake looked impatient.

"You can't make me believe that I feel like hell because I smoke too many cheap cigarettes. There must be something more in it than that."

The doctor agreed. A deuce of a lot more. The whole of civilisation, and the strain of modern life and the subconscious mind, and disharmonies between mind and body and spirit environment.

"I'm afraid I don't follow," said Gilbert Blake irritably.

"What about your adjustment to life?" asked John. "I mean

how do you combine this writing game with social obligations? When do you do your writing? How late do you sit up? How do you get on with your wife and so on? Sorry to be inquisitive, but if I want to put you right——”

Gilbert Blake stood up from his chair and put on his coat and waistcoat thoughtfully, and then stood with his back to the mantelpiece, staring at the rug at his feet.

“I see,” he said. “You mean that there’s nothing wrong with me physically. Just nerves and all that sort of thing. A *malade imaginaire*?”

“Not at all,” answered John. “Unhappiness isn’t an imaginary disease. Not always.”

Gilbert Blake’s face flushed for a moment, and he gave a startled look at this doctor he had called in.

“Unhappiness? . . . Yes, perfectly true. . . . I’m about as happy as a rat in a trap.”

“That’s the trouble,” said John. “Unhappiness affects the internal secretions. It has an odd effect on the heart sometimes. It lowers the physical resistance. It debilitates the nervous system and weakens will-power. Sometimes it leads to queer obsessions, as when you felt you couldn’t walk to that pillar-box, or when you can’t write another line on that neat little typewriter. It’s really quite important to be happy—if possible. That’s where philosophy comes in, or religion. One must get some working philosophy of life which enables one to find a compensation for disappointment and failure, and unsatisfied desires, and so on.”

“Not easy,” remarked Gilbert Blake gloomily.

“Good lord, no! I’ve no quack remedy in that line. But tell me about your work. How many hours a day?”

Gilbert Blake allowed himself to be drawn out after considerable reluctance. Presently he became rather talkative to a man who seemed to understand his trouble. And after that he became passionate and self-revealing, as though some barrier had been broken down and a tide of emotion, long pent up, was pouring through.

This writing was the very devil. People like Lucy didn’t understand. How could she, poor kid? She wanted to be taken out to supper dances and night clubs, to get away from this cursed

little flat where she had nothing to do except to read the novels of other men like himself, poor brutes. Quite natural and perfectly sound. But how could he do any creative work after late nights in a fetid atmosphere? It was impossible to concentrate with a fagged brain. . . .

Then his nerves got all jagged. He said things which were unforgivable and made him want to bite his tongue out and curse himself as a bad tempered swine. Writing made one horribly introspective. When Lucy wanted to talk about a pudding he was thinking out a plot. That didn't make for cheerful breakfasts or pleasant Sunday afternoons. When her friends came into tea, or some of her rich and noisy relatives, he wanted to steal away and get on with the curtain of an unwritten third act. Very unsociable. When she bought a new frock he failed to comment on it because he was wondering whether Jack should marry Jill or strangle the woman. When he had a bath he kept her waiting because he had completely forgotten such a thing as Time, having struck an idea for a new story. . . .

A million little causes of vexation and temper. A fretting of nerves—on both sides. Quarrels after two years of marriage because of his moodiness and impatience and self-centred thoughts. . . .

Then there was the financial side of things. That last play of his had been a failure and he had been banking on it to pay for Lucy's frocks and things. His last novel had dropped dead on the bookstalls. He was getting into a panic and that didn't help creative faculties. One must have self-confidence. One can't write without optimism. One must have sympathy and encouragement instead of criticism and sarcasm. Lucy was one of his critics. Well, of course, why shouldn't she be? She stood in the place of the public. Only it rather dried one up if one's wife went to sleep when one was reading out a play or wondered why he should write such bilge. Not a word of praise. Not a spark of enthusiasm for something he had sweated blood over with ridiculous emotion. Perhaps it was bilge. He was coming to believe it, and that didn't help his style or his temper. . . .

His nerves were all on edge. He found himself arguing with Lucy about trivial differences of opinion which didn't matter a

tinker's curse. Then more passionate scenes about the right place for a picture or whether he had been civil to one of her aunts. No doubt he got on Lucy's nerves. It was a vicious circle so that it was impossible to say who began a quarrel or started nagging. Good God, they were getting to nag at each other like people in a slum dwelling. 'You said I did'—"No I didn't"—"Yes you did"—"Oh hell!" A squalid ending to a love match between two decently educated people. . . .

All his fault, of course—his moodiness, his introspection, his utter self-absorption, his edginess, his desperate craving for sympathy and tenderness and intellectual comradeship, which he couldn't get from Lucy now because—something—little devil doubt—nerves—ill-health—God knows what!—had spoilt all that, so that life seemed a futile farce.

He had been striding up and down the room speaking excitedly forgetting his reserve, taking off his mask—the Englishman's mask—so that beneath he showed the quivering agony of his real self. Then suddenly he stopped, put his hand across his forehead and spoke again with something between a laugh and a sob.

"That's how it is, Doctor. . . . But I don't know why I should tell you all this. . . . For heaven's sake don't give me away!"

"All very difficult," said John. "I quite see the strain on you."

"Near the breaking-point," said Blake in a low voice.

The doctor was silent. There was nothing he could do about a case like this, by any drug or medical treatment. It was a case for psychotherapy—soul doctoring, and even then beyond his range. Perhaps this literary man had a touch of the Narcissus complex. He wanted admiration, homage, the praise of his crowd—denied to him by the critics and especially by the critic on the hearth, that sarcastic little wife who had different views of art and reality. In any case he was overtaxing his creative powers by trying to keep pace with her quest of pleasure—those supper dances and night clubs. She didn't understand the exhaustive processes of creation. Other men stayed up late and went to their jobs next day. Why not a writing man? she thought, no doubt, not knowing how impossible it is to concentrate with a tired brain or to stimulate the

imagination to the birth of a new idea when the nerves are fretted by vexation. This fellow was undoubtedly an "intravert," as Jung would say in the jargon of the new psychology. He had created a world of fantasy out of touch with reality which he believed to be hostile to him. Probably he had been an only son and hadn't adjusted himself to a virile independence. He was the type of man who has a desperate craving for sympathy and understanding, which the modern young wife finds hard to give because she has revolted against feminine surrender so complete and all effacing as in the days of her grandmother. Lucy Blake felt perhaps that too much was demanded of her by this over-sensitive husband—and gave too little.

"A pity you haven't any children," said John. "They create mutual interests and so on."

Gilbert Blake looked at him sombrely.

"Lucy isn't keen on kids. . . . Definitely against them in fact. It's one of the reasons——"

He didn't go further with that thought. It was another cause of secret strife, spasms of ill-temper, nerve storms.

"Well——" said John.

He reassured his patient about his physical condition. There was nothing the matter with his heart. He was just run down. He wanted a rest, and to get his mind off his work a bit. A walking tour with a good friend would do him a world of good. Or if he could spare the time to take up golf—there was nothing so good as an objective interest in a little white ball or any kind of outdoor game.

"Utterly impossible!" cried Gilbert Blake. "I've got to earn some money—and pretty quick."

"Three weeks' holiday will help you to earn it quicker," said John. "You'll come back refreshed. You want to get away from your wife for a bit. That would be good for her."

Gilbert Blake smiled for the first time, but grimly.

"Yes, I daresay she would enjoy a respite."

"It's only fair on her," said John. "I'm an advocate of separate holidays now and then—for husbands and wives. It makes things brighter afterwards."

"Rather dangerous if the holidays last too long," suggested Blake

with some sinister thought in his mind. "One might not resume connubiality."

"There's such a thing as loyalty," John reminded him with a frank glance.

"Oh, rather!" said Gilbert Blake, with a smiling sarcasm. "Loyalty and self-sacrifice. The public school spirit. England expects every man to do his duty, generally without reward."

Rather bitter, poor chap!

John rose and held out his hand.

"Come round and see us sometimes in the evening. There's a boy lodging with us who might interest you. And Janet is always glad when you listen to her music."

Gilbert Blake held on to his hand.

"It's very kind of you, Doctor. I must say I feel better for your visit. Not *angina pectoris* this time, anyhow——"

John laughed.

"Nothing like it! As sound as a bell. Cut down on the cigarettes, won't you? And if you ever want to stretch your legs I'm a demon walker. . . . Janet says she likes your last novel tremendously."

Gilbert Blake's face brightened up, and his eyes shone with an inward light.

"Is that so?"

He was starved of sympathy and leapt to this word of praise like a hungry dog to a bit of meat.

"That plot will come all right," said John, "now you know your heart's all right. It was just a nervous idea that got between you and that typewriter. You'll hear that little bell ringing to-morrow——"

"Think so?" asked Blake doubtfully.

He shook John's hand again and said, "A thousand thanks, Doctor. Extraordinarily nice of you to come."

A difficult case, all the same.

XXIV

THE influenza epidemic was useful to a general practitioner in search of a practice. It advanced stealthily but irresistibly, like the German method of "infiltration" in the attack of March, 1918. It captured Pavilion Road in its first assault so that the garages were thronged with shivering chauffeurs; and the cash chemists in the King's Road (spelt chymists in Belgravia) were almost out of aspirin. It crept up Sloane Street, clutching at the throats of well-nourished women. It invaded the basements and bed-sitting-rooms of Smith Street and Whitehead's Grove. It took the whole of Chelsea Embankment like the front line trenches after a gas attack. Novelists, like Gilbert Blake, pushed away their typewriters, losing the threads of their plots and developing suicidal tendencies. Actresses, like Miss Joan Wittington, sneezed in the first act and fainted in the third. Bus drivers were stricken at the wheel, feeling drunk and disorderly without the least excuse. Members of Parliament and even Cabinet Ministers wrote insulting letters to their constituents and were more than usually rude to their wives before realising their malady. And the telephone of Number 13, Walpole Street, rang quite often now.

John Jevons, M.D., set out on his rounds with a sense of service which kept him cheerful, though he wasn't a "ghoul" as Janet once called him. But if people *would* get ill he was glad to help them. Not that he could do much more than tell them to stay in bed and keep warm. Medical science in spite of all this hullabaloo about "progress" was utterly stumped by a malignant microbe not yet isolated. Perhaps it was a touch of romance in his imagination, due to books he had read as a boy, or some strain of heredity from a literary great-grandmother, which made each visit a new adventure to him. As a doctor he had that Open Sesame to other people's lives. Doors opened to him in the secret city

where people hide from their neighbours. Masks were taken off in his presence, as Gilbert Blake had taken off his mask, for just a moment or two. He looked into their eyes and sometimes into their souls and was pitiful because so many seemed caught in a man-trap of this civilisation with its mental and social strains.

With an artist's eye—hereditary that, also, perhaps—there was not a day or night in which he did not discover some new aspect of beauty in the streets and squares of London. He loved it at night when he walked about his neighbourhood—sometimes it was hardly worth while taking out "the little old bus" as he called his Morris-Oxford, when so many of his patients were only ten minutes away on foot. Sloane Square lost its squalour at night, after rain, with a purple light on its pavement and advertisement signs winking out in many colours, and the coffee stall throwing a yellow gleam through its open window, and red lamps strung like Chinese lanterns on to poles railing off the roundabout for traffic.

The gardens of the London squares were glamorous and mystical at night when their wet trees were shining under the lamp-posts—little sanctuaries of peace in the noisy warfare of London life where birds twittered as dawn came over the chimney pots, as sometimes he saw it come after a late case.

The London dawn was good enough when the old river gleamed under a luminous veil of mist and its bridges seemed to lead to dim fortresses—squalid old factories really—or to enchanted woods—which was Battersea Park—under rose-flushed clouds in a turquoise sky where perhaps a star still shone. The Lots Road power-house with its four tall chimneys away to the right there beyond Turner's reach, loomed immense and insubstantial through the mist, symbolising the might of the machine which drives the wheels of this city and speeds up the rhythm of its beating pulse.

This doctor, always watching and listening, seemed aware sometimes of the soul of London. All these individual lives he met, all these seething crowds about him, all these patients of his, became merged at times in his imagination into one living organism which was London. A gay old city it appeared to him sometimes when the rare sun twinkled on buses and motor-cars and all the little flappers were rushing off to work. A brave old city, he

thought, crowded with gallant folk, heroic and humorous when foul weather beat against its walls and windows and spread a slime of mud along its streets, and flung a wet blanket over its chimney pots. But often it frightened him as a restless, nervous, fever-stricken city with a jerky pulse and a temperature a point above normal and odd neuroses in its subconscious mind.

He wondered where all these people were going in the eternal scheme of things, as he threaded his way through them down the King's Road. To what goal were they hurrying in human evolution? Had they any kind of spiritual purpose or any meaning to themselves? Had he? . . . That baby who was waiting to be born in Whitehead's Grove—what kind of life was it going to find in this hectic civilisation of ours which is so bewildered with its own conditions and so uncertain of the future?

Most of those patients of his were suffering in their minds rather than in their bodies. Their physical ailments, apart from malignant microbes—and perhaps including some of them—were mainly due to intellectual maladjustments—jangling disharmonies of mind and body. Civilisation put a strain on them which was sometimes intolerable. No wonder they snapped sometimes. There was a constant fretting at the nerves due to the pace of the social rhythm and the myriad impressions beating upon the mind and senses with never a rest.

Those winking lights; that tide of traffic; those newspaper placards; the constant irritation of trivial interests; every sensibility excited by the pageantry of shop windows, by the lure of a luxury beyond their reach, by artfully stimulated desires which were never satisfied. They could find no satisfaction because they could find no harmony between themselves and the mystery of things. All they could do was to dope themselves, in order to forget, in order not to think, in order to stupefy the nagging of desire, and this restlessness. It was all dope, really—the theatres and cinemas, those boring night clubs, those erotic novels, the worship of professional sport among millions who never played a game and hadn't the chance to play—the sensationalism of the newspapers, the programmes of the wireless. Dope for maladjusted minds. Dope for neurasthenics. Dope for over-worked men. Dope for unsatisfied women. And like all dope, it caused inevitable regressions and

reactions, intensifying the need of new excitement and creating a tolerance for harmful stimulant.

No wonder some of them snapped under the strain. The marvel is that so many don't snap—those young girls who take everything in their stride and keep smiling unless they get into trouble with repressed instincts and the unfulfilment of dreams. That was the unsolved problem which lurked in every hiding place in this secret city. It was the spectre of sex which haunted these streets and squares crowded with girls in excess of boys, and with women who could not find their mates, and with men who could not afford to marry, and with marriages that somehow failed. The passion of the hive was thwarted and disordered by economic conditions, and its impulses—its terrific vital hungry urge—were sometimes repressed into dark obsessions of the unconscious, or became a nagging fretfulness of conscious unhappiness, or led innocent and ignorant souls into the jungle of this dark forest which is civilisation, where they cried in vain for light and guidance. Religion had lost its authority over many minds. Faith in supernatural compensations for worldly suffering no longer worked with the multitude of unbelievers. There was no philosophy to take its place, nothing to reconcile the individual with his fate, nor a woman with lovelessness.

"Lord!" said Dr. Jevons, striding along the King's Road on his way to a case, "how are we going to deal with this question of sex? It beats me all right. No quackery is any good for that problem!"

In the darkness of a doorway down Royal Avenue a private of the Scots Guards was kissing his girl. In the shadow of a pillar-box beyond the lamplight a little servant maid was saying good-night to her young man with her face against his waistcoat buttons. In other dim places as the doctor passed were young couples in the silent ecstasy of furtive love—the secret passion of London by night. And behind all the darkened windows and drawn blinds was the drama of London life—another little scene of it—to which this doctor might be called one day for help and service when something "snapped."

And he would go with smiling eyes beneath those funny eyebrows of his, and a cheery bedside manner, and a few feeble

attempts at suggestion or psychotherapy knowing all the time that he was groping for truth and guidance like all his patients, bewildered like they were, and feeling the strain. That love business, for instance? . . . Doctor Jevons smiled to himself in the darkness and spoke aloud with a comical groan.

“Physician, heal thyself!” he said.

THAT boy Eric Pardoe was one of the lesser victims of the influenza epidemic. For several days he had come home with gloomy stories of actors and actresses stricken by that malady—much to the annoyance of the producer who was working against time on the “Passions of Pamela” and had to keep his sets waiting because two of the stars were in bed and a third of his crowd had melted away somewhere in the outer suburbs. That man with a megaphone and a great gift of sulphurous language regarded the whole thing as a conspiracy against him or at least as unforgivable nonsense, until he was taken with a high temperature and pains in the stomach and was driven away in a Daimler to his house of sin (that was Eric Pardoe’s phrase) in Wimbledon.

“What can you expect,” asked Eric, “when the studio is an ice-well and he keeps his crowd hanging about without mercy? More often than not without food—the skunk. The man ought to be prosecuted for cruelty to animals. Meanwhile no work no pay—except for the stars. Lots of girls in the crowd will lose their wages and have to go without their grub—poor little beasts! I will say they show a lot of pluck.”

Dr. Jevons noted with secret approval that touch of pity and admiration. It showed that this boy thought occasionally of somebody besides himself. But he was certainly in a funk of catching influenza, judging from bottles of aspirin on his mantelpiece and various quack remedies—utterly useless for resisting infection—imported to his bedroom, and wafts of some perfectly foul form of disinfectant which came from his handkerchiefs.

Janet chaffed him about this as she did about most things.

“This house smells like a hospital. Anybody funking the ‘flu? If so I warn him that he’s sure to get it.”

“A few simple precautions,” said Eric Pardoe looking self-

conscious. "This rotten bug seems to be developing into pneumonia this year and I don't regard it as a pleasant jest."

Janet had it on the tip of her tongue to make some sarcastic repartee, but suddenly she exchanged glances with her brother and seemed to read his thoughts. This boy who was afraid of the 'flu had tried to gas himself not long ago. It looked as if he had become reconciled with life rather more.

"As long as one takes care of oneself in the first stages——" she said in a motherly way.

That night he came home late from the studio and after supper crouched over the fire. He disappeared quietly while Janet was playing the piano and presently she noticed his absence.

"What's the matter with Adonis?" she asked. "He seems very sorry for himself, as usual."

"I'd better take a look at him," said John.

Young Pardoe had slipped into bed and complained of feeling "putrid." Certainly he had a temperature and the usual symptoms of headache and gastric pains.

John reported his diagnosis gloomily.

"The 'flu all right. . . . A bit of a nuisance. I don't quite see how we're going to manage now that Mrs. Meggs is bad with bronchitis."

Janet was thoughtful and John was afraid for a moment that she was going to reproach him for having brought this boy into the house although she was not one of those who say, "I told you so!" But his eyes brightened at the sporting way she took it.

"I daresay I can look after him a bit. . . . It's no use *your* getting worried, Jacko. It's your job that matters."

The doctor bent over her as she turned over a page of music, and put his hand on her shoulder with a friendly pressure.

"That's a nice way of putting it. Still, I don't want to break up that hat shop."

"Things are a bit slack," said Janet.

They were slack enough it seemed to allow her to take time off now and then to keep an eye on young Pardoe who was fairly bad for a week or two. It meant hard work for Janet as Mrs. Meggs kept her bronchitis in the kitchen and refused to come

above stairs, beyond answering the door and ascending wheezily to her bedroom at night.

"Let me take up the boy's breakfast," suggested John once or twice, but Janet always answered in the same way.

"That's all right, Jacko. It's good exercise!"

She also took up his other meals, John having to scamp through his own, and sometimes came home early from the shop to sit up in the bedroom of a patient who was becoming morbidly bored with himself now that his gastric pains had departed and there was nothing the matter with him beyond weakness and general depression.

"I hope that young scamp is grateful for all you're doing for him," said John one day when he met her in the hall carrying down a tray.

"Oh, there's nothing to be grateful for," she answered carelessly. I rather like doing it as a matter of fact. It makes me feel like the Lady of the Lamp and that sort of nonsense."

She fluttered her eyelashes at him and he wondered why she was shy of him suddenly. It was probably because she hated him to think that she was doing anything particularly benevolent.

As far as John was concerned the patient in his own house was fairly civil but not effusive. During the first stage of his malady he was indeed inclined to be sulky, and in answer to enquiries answered that he felt "damn' rotten" or "like hell," and described his symptoms with a fretful exaggeration which made his doctor laugh. Afterwards he admitted grudgingly that he felt better, and one morning went as far as to say that he was sorry for making such an ass of himself in another person's house. Even more than that, a little later when John sat on the end of his bed reading the paper.

"I'm afraid I've been a confounded nuisance to your sister," he added. "I don't see how I can ever pay her back for being so decent to a swine like me."

John grinned over the edge of his paper.

"She's generally like that—is our Janet, only occasionally indecent."

Eric Pardoe smiled at this quip.

"Perhaps that was a wrong way of putting it, but I dare say you get what I mean."

"Perfectly, old man," said John. "Only you needn't worry yourself about paying back. Janet doesn't go around helping the sick and needy because she wants to be paid—except by friendship."

"Oh, if friendship's any good to her——" exclaimed Eric Pardoe with a touch of enthusiasm which he checked hastily, flushing slightly as though he had been guilty of sentiment.

And certainly friendship did seem good for Janet as her brother observed once or twice with his watchful eyes. It was obvious that the boy amused her a good deal, and that she was beginning to like his company and conversation though most of the time she seemed to be chipping him or else arguing with him rather hotly about his "absurd ideas" as she called them bluntly. She laughed rather more than she used to do. Sometimes when this doctor opened his hall door with his latchkey after a round of patients he could hear his sister's laughter, low-toned and musical, in the back room where those two sat close to the fire, after supper, or at tea time during Eric's convalescence. Another argument, he supposed, about some book on which they disagreed, or some play they had seen before they knew each other, or some point of view about life which they saw from different angles, Janet being thirty-two, with the war in the background of her mind, and this boy twenty-two, utterly indisciplined and embittered—with the impatience and anger of youth—at life's "injustice," due, perhaps, to his own strain of weakness. He was talkative with Janet, in a quick, eager, emotional way with an occasional stutter which gave a charm and emphasis sometimes to his way of putting things, though he "dried up" at once when the doctor appeared. Once or twice John found them in a room lit only by the firelight, Janet in the low arm-chair, and the boy lying at full stretch on the hearthrug with his hands behind his head, or sitting hunched up on the floor with his hands clasped round his knees like a faun on a greensward. There was, indeed, something faun-like in his delicate face—a little feminine and weak—but wonderfully classical in profile like a Greek cameo, as the doctor had thought when he had seen him lying on that bed in Smith Street, very near to death.

Janet has a new toy, thought Dr. Jevons. She's pulling the strings to see how they work. More amusing than a fox terrier, this boy with a grudge against God.

But even a doctor with watchful eyes and a habit of studying the minds of those about him doesn't see everything. He didn't see Janet when she went into her own bedroom and shut the door to the outside world—this little house in Walpole Street with her brother downstairs smoking his last pipe for the night and Eric only a brick and a half away from her wardrobe so that she could hear him turning and twisting in bed when he wasn't well, or groaning loudly sometimes when he couldn't get to sleep, even turning over the leaves of a book he was reading. Janet moved about her room stealthily so that he should not be aware how clearly she could hear. She was careful of a creaking board near the dressing-table and of the squeak when she opened the wardrobe. Often she stood quite still before undressing listening to the movements of that boy, so close to her, so restless, so easily disturbed as a bad sleeper. She smiled at the thought of him there a brick and a half away, lying in bed with his pyjamas open at the throat, and tousled hair, as she would see him in the morning when she took up his breakfast. She wished he wouldn't kiss her hands now when she had put down the tray. Not that she objected to having her hands kissed—it amused her really—but it was rather silly. And it had been weak of her to kiss him on the forehead one morning and then let him pull her head down and kiss her on the cheek, shyly and boyishly, as though she were his mother. He was like those boys in the war—Jack Lavington and others—who had wanted to be kissed by the hospital nurses when they lay wounded in the wards or had a touch of trench fever, or shell shock.

Some of the nurses had told her about that when she was working in the canteen. It didn't mean anything. They just wanted to be mothered—those "Heroes of the Great War" who looked like schoolboys when they were tucked up in bed. Eric was just like them. He reminded her painfully sometimes of Jack Lavington—ten years ago. He had the same way of talking, with a little stutter now and then if he got excited. And he was a shell shock case, really, only he had been shell shocked in peace instead of war by getting all wrong with life and knocked edgewise by that little drab who had teased him into love and then gone off with a shop assistant. There was nothing wrong with him except a weakness of character and a sensitive egotism which made him think the world

was against him. His father had been too stern with him and his mother seemed to be a selfish woman always having headaches and expecting everybody to wait on her, and living on her reputation as a beauty in India when all the subalterns had flirted with her. Eric had been left behind in England, pushed off to a public school when he ought to have been in the nursery, made to play games which he hated, flogged for things he hadn't done because one of the masters had a "downer" on him. So he had told her with a self-pity which she had jeered at though she was sorry for him. That coldness of his to John—his casual way of behaviour—was only a defence of his shyness and sentiment. He was very grateful, to John really, and had a tremendous respect for him—and envy because John seemed to be a master of life and so strong. Now he was getting sentimental with her. That kissing of hands and so on.

He had had tears in his eyes one day, like a baby, because she was cross with him about something. It was something he had said about modern girls being immoral little sluts. She couldn't stand for that knowing how splendid they were—like Joan Wittington and Margaret Murston and Cynthia Ide. She had felt very hot about it and called him a dirty little dog and hadn't spoken to him for the rest of the day until she saw those tears in his eyes. He couldn't bear her not to speak to him, and it was absurd how pleased he was when she relented and let him talk nonsense again. But she would have to be careful—of herself, to be honest. Eric just wanted to be mothered. She had staggered him one day by telling him that she was thirty-two. It seemed a terrible age to him, as she could tell by the look in his eyes. A middle-aged woman to him, though she felt so young, and wasn't old anyhow. She wished he didn't remind her so much of Jack Lavington. . . .

And sometimes she was just a little afraid that she was becoming ridiculous, so that she felt fussed if John wanted to take up Eric's breakfast or if she couldn't get away from the shop as soon as she had hoped because some chattering woman couldn't choose the type of hat that suited her. She had been very snappy with one of them to the amusement of Nina Ziborova who regarded her as a saint with the patience of an angel. She ought to be more careful. She really ought not to have kissed Eric on the forehead that morning before he pulled her head down and kissed her cheek. It was

because he looked so boyish, such a perfect baby, lying in bed there with a pain in his tummy, so sorry for himself! She couldn't be a baby snatcher at her age. She had done with all that anyhow ten years ago when Jack was killed after three days' Paris leave when she had been with him.

Janet, with her bedroom door shut stood listening to the movements of that boy in the other room. She heard him give a deep-drawn sigh and throw his book on to the floor. He had flung himself down on his pillow. Presently by the stillness she knew that he was asleep and then she crept across her room and undressed with hardly a sound and slipped into bed, but kept awake for some time because silly tears kept oozing up until her pillow was wet. Janet's bedroom was one of the doors in the hidden city which was shut against Dr. Jevons—that hidden city of the subconscious mind into which he liked to delve.

XXVI

JOHN JEVONS, M.D., was getting to be known in the Chelsea neighbourhood so that when he went out on his rounds or for a stroll towards the Embankment he was greeted by some of the patients he had cured or, as Janet would say, had failed to kill. And he liked those greetings, being a sociable being and fond of humanity.

It pleased him—he suspected himself of an exhibition complex—when Police Constable Widgery held up the traffic for him across King's Road and then gave the salute of one East Kent to another with a slight wink as though to say, "A great game, this life, Doctor! You and I know a thing or two about human nature. A rum business!"

It amused him when the man at the coffee stall waved a friendly mug at him and jerked his thumb towards some little maiden in a short frock, with a secret message. "Don't know the first thing about life, she don't. She'll be wantin' you before long, Doctor. Tummy ache or heartache. We know!"

He was glad to lift his hat to one of those girls at the training college at the corner of Walpole Street and Cheltenham Terrace. She had given him the glad-eye quite unmistakably out of the window more than once, and he hadn't resented it. Life would be the merrier for more glad-eyes. Then she had called round at his consulting-room one day with the preposterous pretence that she had tuberculosis. Not a thing wrong with her except a lack of boy friends. Perhaps she'd spotted Eric Pardoe going into the house and thought she might wangle an introduction. Well, he would get Janet to ask her to tea one day. Miss Margery Dubbs, and a pretty girl, from Bexhill.

Then there was Nina Ziborova, Janet's pal, who laughed at him through the plate-glass window of the hat shop, and raised her hands with a comical gesture of despair which said very clearly

as he had heard her say, "This life in London! Once I was a great little lady in Russia. . . . You English people have no passion, no romance, no love of beauty, but I like you very much all the same with your cold stupidity and your self-conceit, and your funny shyness."

She sent for him one day to her little flat in Church Street, Chelsea—over a tea shop conducted by some of her Russian friends—where she lived with her brother Serge when he wasn't travelling in the country to sell ladies' undies to wholesale dealers. She had a *samovar* on a small table and a Russian *ikon* in the corner of the room and some beautiful little miniatures of grandfathers and grandmothers, and uncles and aunts, who were very big people in Russia before the Terror, the end of all things as far as their kind were concerned. Not much room in that little flat, so that Dr. Jevons had to sit on Nina's bed while she lay back in the only arm-chair and described her symptoms which were certainly alarming if one believed them.

"The fact is, Doctor, I think I am going perfectly mad."

Having said that very gravely she laughed as though it were the greatest joke in the world, excessively funny.

She thought she must be going perfectly mad because sometimes in that hat shop with Janet she had an almost irresistible desire to tear all the hats to pieces and then to pull all her clothes off—not many really—and run out naked into Sloane Square. How on earth did he account for that?

He couldn't account for it. He hoped she wouldn't yield to the impulse. He knew a respectable police constable named Widgery who would have something to say about it.

Sometimes she wanted to smash the plate-glass windows of Harrod's. She had a really devilish temptation to hear the glass go crash in a thousand splinters. . . . How did he account for that?

He just couldn't. But he advised her not to do so. Perhaps she was feeling a bit fed up with English respectability. It was probably some childish impulse of destruction rising up from her subconscious mind. Or some racial instinct. Hadn't she a touch of Tartar blood? Yes, he was right there, and by degrees he seemed to get closer to that desire to do outrageous things. As a child she had been told frightful tales of anarchists. Her own grandfather

had been blown to bits by a bomb. Afterwards she had lived through the Russian revolution terrified, suffering mental tortures. All that had created an unconscious conflict. She had been afraid of her childish desires to be naughty—anarchical. She had repressed her belief in liberty and her instinctive desire to rebel against conventions—"You mustn't do this, you mustn't do that," of nurses and governesses. "Only those dreadful anarchists would behave like such a naughty child!" Now perhaps when she was run down or over-worked she was tempted to do the very things of which she was most afraid. She wanted to smash things, to break out, to run wild, to liberate her primitive instincts.

That was his theory after listening to her self-revelation and it seemed to relieve her mind, although she didn't agree with him quite.

"I believe it is nothing but your very dreadful climate," she told him. "Sometimes I wish to scream when I see the rain and the fog and the fog and the rain. Or it is perhaps the, oh, so very hideous monotony of that little shop with the ladies who think they are beautiful but are not so. Or again, it may be other things, that disturb us poor women who crave the beauty and joy of life but feel quite starved. My poor little sensitive heart—the passion of a Russian soul in exile——"

She had kept him there for an hour discussing life and passion and the Russian temperament, while she made tea for him in the *samovar* and wept a little when she spoke of her Russian home in Moscow and laughed a great deal, but charmingly not noisily, when she described her dreadful adventures of poverty when she had lived with Serge in Constantinople and Berlin before they found work and friendship in England. A brave little lady, but highly strung and wanting more out of life than she could find in a hat shop or this little flat in Chelsea. He was glad to get a wave from her hand as he passed that window in Sloane Square.

Now and again he met Gilbert Blake that novelist who had taken off his mask one night. He did not look quite so haunted though a touch of 'flu had pulled him down. He had resumed work on a new play which seemed to be going fairly well though he was suffering damnable tortures in the third act. How little the public know of those secret agonies when they go to a new play and think

it rather "thin," or borrow the latest novel from their library and skim it between tea and supper!

Smudge, as Janet called him, had taken advantage of that invitation to come round sometimes after supper, and John noticed that he stayed late if Janet happened to be alone but sheered off rapidly if that boy Eric were anywhere about, or if John himself had a quiet evening without a call on the telephone. Natural enough, of course. He wanted sympathy and Janet had a genius that way and a special liking for Smudge. She admired his work and told him so, and let him read out some of his stuff, now and then. What could be more delightful or comforting to an author who did not please his critics and especially the critic by his own hearth-side, who preferred life to literature.

But it was foolish of that fellow Smudge to resent Janet's affection for young Pardoe whom she had taken under her wing. The boy, too, was lamentably uncivil to this literary man, six years older than himself, whose novels he dismissed with cold contempt in private conversation with Janet, much to her annoyance. Probably they were very much of the same type really, both craving sympathy from Janet and therefore grudging a fair deal to the other fellow.

One evening when Smudge came in, Eric, who had been sitting on a footstool before the fire, developed a sudden desire for fresh air, in spite of pouring rain, and went out with a murderous look in his eyes, banging the front door after him.

Janet's face flushed slightly while Smudge raised his eyebrows and said, "What's the matter with our little movie-merchant? Is there anything wrong with his glands—or just bad manners?"

Young Pardoe came back late that night, wet through and sulky. He went to his bed without saying good-night to Janet who had made some hot cocoa for him, which he declined with thanks.

An amusing little comedy, thought John, without any harm lurking in it, and a good tribute to his sister's kindness of heart.

XXVII

THERE were other friends he met on fine mornings now when there was the veritable touch of spring in the air at last and green buds on the bushes in Chelsea Gardens, and cheerful people forgetting a sullen winter and a deadly March in this warm breath from the south-west with the sun in the shop windows.

One of them was that girl Cynthia Ide. She came from Cadogan Square into the Royal Hospital Gardens with an Alsatian on the lead, until she was well through the stone gateway and past the old pensioners sitting on the wooden benches and smoking their first pipes of the day, when she unleashed that big beautiful beast of hers, and said, "Hi, Wolf! Off with you, then!"

"I suppose it won't want to wolf *me* by any chance?" asked John on one of these meetings.

"As harmless as a lamb," said Cynthia, surprised at his funk which was only a pretence. "He once tried to maul the local butcher, but that was entirely the man's own fault. Wolf smelt the blood of beasts upon him."

"Well, I had to do a minor operation yesterday," said John. "I hope that hound doesn't suspect anything."

She jeered at him and invited him to sit on one of the benches with her near a flower bed where the first hyacinths were out looking like pretty ladies in silk frocks, if you happened to look at them that way, as this doctor did.

Cynthia Ide had just come back from the Riviera. Two weeks at Cannes, then the inevitable Monte, with her father and mother.

"Any fun?" asked John.

Not much fun it seemed. The usual thing. Gala nights with elderly people throwing streamers at each other and pretending to be gay. The cocktail hour outside the Hotel de Paris with a poisonous crowd of the would-be smart—elderly men with eyeglasses and dyed hair, enamelled women in frocks from Molyneux

—or Selfridges—old generals and their wives, impecunious peers trying to earn a bit at the tables, lots of frumps, poor dears.

“No young people?”

“Oh, yes, a few. American flappers having a good time. . . . And Basil Hyde, on sick leave after influenza.”

She laughed and blushed a little as her doctor noticed that reference to Basil Hyde.

“How have you been sleeping lately?”

“Not too well, Doctor. Headaches again!”

He suspected that. She looked worried about something—and nervy.

“That funny dream again?”

She looked up and smiled.

“Yes. Isn’t it extraordinary? Several times lately. Running away from something—always being chased—and then finding safety in odd places. Last time it was a cupboard where I kept an old doll I used to have when I was a baby girl. A wax doll with the paint rubbed off. It seemed to give me a sense of comfort and safety—in that silly dream!”

“Smoking too many cigarettes?”

Well, she smoked a few. She smoked one then, scoffing at him and offering one from a nice little box of enamelled gold.

“Father and mother are preparing to paint London red,” she told him. “Dinners and receptions from now till the end of the season. I’m afraid I’m going to get rather tired! I shall have to come round to restful Janet. A little sanctuary in Walpole Street with the people I envy because they have work to do, and read the books I like.”

“Fine idea,” said John. “The door always opened promptly if you knock three times and whistle the Frothblowers’ Anthem.”

She rose and whistled back that Alsatian which was chasing a dachshund to death.

“Father’s rather peeved with me,” she told him presently.

“He thinks I ought to get married—goodness knows why! There was a little breeze last night in Cadogan Square. . . . I *won’t* get married if I don’t want to!”

“Certainly not,” said John. “Why should you, unless you want to?”

She stood there smiling with just a little worry in her eyes, and the sun glinting in that harvest-coloured hair because she had pulled off her hat with a shake of her head in the south-west wind. A tall slim thing, in a knitted frock and jumper, of a rather jolly blue, and a pleasant picture, thought this doctor of hers, in the gardens of the Royal Hospital with the first hyacinths in flower.

"Wolf and I like these gardens," she said. "We shall come here again before lunch time which I call 'after breakfast.' If you happen to be walking this way we might have a chat now and then."

A friendly invitation from a young lady of quality! And the doctor in Walpole Street happened to walk that way a number of times before lunch which she called "after breakfast." He found himself booking up his patients at hours which would leave him twenty minutes or so for that morning stroll. He caught himself looking at his wrist-watch when one of his patients was describing the symptoms of his or her ill-health. This urgent desire for a walk before the midday meal seemed to him a question of keeping fit.

"I must get fresh air and exercise," he assured himself earnestly. "I owe it to my patients. A doctor ought to practise what he preaches—*mens sana in corpore sano*."

It was generally Wolf who spotted him, bounding up with a great demonstration of affection now that he knew his mistress had friendly feelings towards this man with long legs who smelt sometimes of ether and other strange vapours. Cynthia waved her hand from a distance and then they strolled across the grass towards the tall obelisk with a golden ball which commemorated some forgotten war, or sat on one of the benches—generally with one of the old pensioners smoking his pipe at the other end of it.

Cynthia kept him posted on the doings of high society beyond his own circle of life. Those doings seemed to him very silly and he was amazed and scandalised at the way in which people presumed to be intelligent violated the most elementary rules of physical and mental well-being. Why turn night into day, for instance? How could these people like Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament and barristers and business men do their jobs with clear minds and a steady pulse if they went to social

receptions every night until the small hours of the morning? Not fair on the nation, he thought. And how could young girls like Cynthia, to say nothing of their mothers, expect to keep well and decently poised after so many late dances from which they went on to night clubs in their restless desire to avoid boredom and keep amused. What about the boys who had to go to work next day? How grossly unfair on them!

Cynthia laughed at his anger which she thought very amusing but perfectly right.

"Of course, it's all futile," she agreed. "As for avoiding boredom there is no escape. A night club is the deadliest of all places in which boredom reigns supreme."

"And yet you go," protested Dr. Jevons, glancing anxiously at this boyish-looking girl who never seemed to sleep as far as he could make out, and yet kept her flower-like freshness by some secret of vitality beyond his knowledge like so many modern girls—except for that nervous restlessness which he observed in her now and then.

"And yet one goes—just now and then!" she said a little mockingly.

She was expected to go. Society demanded that duty of her. She had to show herself. Otherwise she would not meet her friends. It was the system. Boys like Basil Hyde—and others—would think she was very unsportsmanlike if she departed from them at half-past ten and said "me for bedibyes!"

"One has to play the game," said Cynthia Ide. "The Press photographers insist on it. 'The beautiful Cynthia Ide'—see this week's *Tatler*. On the Lido. At the Duchess of Downshire's Fancy Dress Ball in aid of the distressed miners. The charming daughter of Sir Francis Ide was seen last night at the Embassy Club looking exquisite in a creation by Madame Rose."

"Disgraceful business," said Dr. Jevons. "No wonder so many of my patients get nervous breakdowns!"

One morning when that Alsatian came romping towards him and trotted back to his mistress after a friendly pat, John found a rather silent Cynthia on one of the benches. She smiled her greeting and then distressed him by trying to blink away some tears which she could not hide from him.

"Sorry!" she said. "Very absurd of me, Doctor."

"Anything wrong?" asked John.

"It's all so utterly ridiculous!" she told him and dabbed her eyes with a little lace handkerchief, and laughed at the same time because of being so childish.

"Over tired, I expect," said John.

No, it wasn't that. It was something much worse than that, though she didn't want to confess her woes by the wayside, with Chelsea pensioners about and nursemaids with babies in perambulators. In any case, why should she inflict her absurd problems on a hard-worked doctor?

"That's what I'm here for," explained John. "It's what I get paid for—when people pay me. Not that I go touting for business."

He made her smile by his way of putting things, and his ready sympathy, and his humorous eyes. That bedside manner of his!

"I'm in trouble about this marriage business," she confessed rather miserably but with a touch of comedy. "There are no less than four men who say their lives will be shattered if I won't be kind to them—that is to say, if I won't promise to love, honour and obey them till death us do part. Isn't it ridiculous?"

"Four!" exclaimed John. "Well, you can't marry them all, that's certain."

That's what she had told them! One of them had been very angry about it and wanted to know why she had led him on—just because she had let him take her about here and there out of kindness of heart. And the other had threatened to shoot himself because he said life would be rotted up if she didn't love him. And another one had gone off to Kenya where he was going to grow coffee. As if it were her fault!

"And the fourth?" asked John. "I hope he hasn't joined the Suicide Club."

"It's Basil Hyde," she said. "I don't know what to do about it. He's absolutely mad."

It appeared that Basil Hyde was getting—stupid. He had taken her down to Henley one night for supper—just to get away from the usual crowd for a while. At the Lion—a jolly old inn—he had ordered a private sitting-room with a fire in it so that they could

have a quiet talk. She had liked him for that until he had started behaving very foolishly. He had locked the door and put the key in his pocket and said he wouldn't open it until she promised to marry him, even if they stayed there all night. As if she were going to be bullied like that! Then he had tried to kiss her and there was a look in his eyes that had frightened her. A silly look. She had pulled the bell-rope until everybody in the hotel came running up and Basil had to open the door and pretended that he felt ill and wanted some brandy. And the funny thing was that he looked ill. His face was as white as a sheet.

"A guilty conscience," said John, laughing at this strange tale but feeling rather alarmed about it. "Bad form, locking the door like that. And one doesn't kiss a girl unless she likes it."

"Sometimes I do like it," she admitted with surprising candour and a faint blush, and a little uneasy smile. "You see Basil has been my special friend and I like him when he's nice and kind. But I hate it when he gets foolish like that."

"Well," said the doctor rather gravely, "it doesn't do to lead these fellows a dance. It's hardly fair. I mean if you let them kiss you it's asking for trouble, don't you think?"

She thought over that prospect of trouble, looking away across the flower-beds to the old hospital for war veterans with its brown walls and high windows below a dormer roof.

"I'm beginning to feel unsafe," she admitted. "These absurd boys want me so much because I happened to be born without a snub nose, or something. . . . I suppose I shall be *forced* into marriage, and I hate the idea of it. Why can't they behave nicely, like friends? . . . I wish I could feel safe, Doctor!"

She laughed again as though she were talking nonsense, but the doctor suspected that she meant what she said about the dislike of marriage. Queer, that.

Perhaps it was for a sense of safety, a place of escape from ardent lovers, her little sanctuary as she once called it, that she came round several times to the house with the brass plate in Walpole Street, generally rather late after dinner in wonderful frocks which brought a glint of gold or a foam of white, or the glow of rose-red silk into the doctor's sitting-room where she sat curled up on the fender seat while Janet played, or with her head against Nina

Ziborova's white shoulder—not that that lady had yielded to her primitive impulses!—while Gilbert Blake discoursed on books or plays and Lucy, his wife, drooped in the low arm-chair like a tired lily after a week of late nights with bridge-playing friends. Janet was disappointed that Cynthia had not met Eric Pardoe yet, but that young man had gone for a trip to Nice for some Riviera scenes in “The Passions of Pamela.”

Dr. Jevons was attracted by that girl Cynthia as he had admitted to Janet after her first visit. She interested him as a new problem. Most of the young girls with whom he came in contact professionally had no intellectual objection to marriage, though many of them—these working girls—carried on very gaily and happily, as far as one could judge, in single blessedness, not bothering much about the emotional side of life, and adopting a somewhat satirical attitude towards love and romance. Perhaps that was in self-defence because it was hard to meet the right man—or any kind of man—the male sex being scarce in these days, or not up to their standard. Some of them certainly were bothered. Like Miss Margaret Dubbs and others they looked around for some seemly youth on whom they could bestow the glad-eye and get a satisfactory answer. They felt the need of love. They knew that life for them lacked its purpose and its vital meaning if that side of their nature were unfulfilled.

And that was one of the problems which led to much unhappiness and many tragedies in the secret life of London as he was beginning to see, when doors opened to him in side streets or quiet squares. Yet Cynthia—this slim tall thing, who took beauty with her on her walks, to whom old men and young paid homage with their eyes, had some secret distress at the thought of marriage which vexed her lovers. She lured them by a kind of boyish *camaraderie*, even let them kiss her if they were “nice and kind,” and then was angry or tearful if they revealed any urgency of passion. That was some hidden complex, nagging at her in the underworld of her mind. One day he might find out.

Meanwhile he had decided to give up those meetings in Chelsea Gardens. They were perhaps a little unprofessional. Of course, it was only just an odd chance that their walks coincided. It was his rule of life to keep fit for the sake of his vocation, and Chelsea

Gardens happened to be handy, and the half-hour before lunch most convenient to him. But a doctor has to be discreet. He must watch his step like a cat on hot bricks lest he should do anything even slightly unprofessional. One of these days, of course, he would have to get married. He had been thinking about it lately rather insistently. After all he was thirty-five and hadn't too much time ahead if he wanted a wife before he became middle-aged and bald-headed. There was a patch at the back of his head which was getting uncommonly thin. And lately he had had odd dreams about a little wood nymph who lured him through a copse to a running stream where she laughed and disappeared leaving him with a sense of desolation generally broken abruptly by the wheezy voice of Mrs. Meggs, saying, "Your tea, sir!" Also he had had moments of absent-mindedness when going his rounds which he was bound to interpret in a Freudian sense. Once he stood in front of a window of Harrod's where some lovely ladies with waxen faces reclined in pyjamas of white silk embroidered with dragons. Goodness knows why they should have given him a day-dream in which he saw himself going down the steps of St. Peter's, Eton Square, with a young bride in a white veil who looked remarkably like Cynthia Ide. Police Constable Widgery was there and saluted impressively with a slightly satirical wink . . . until the day-dream vanished with a sudden start alarming to an old lady standing by his side. Good heavens! What absurd thoughts to come into the head of a general practitioner! Dangerous and humiliating, really. . . . Still, there was no reason why he shouldn't look around for some nice girl who might be willing to share his life of service, which would be rough on her, of course. Night calls. Constant interruptions. No free time as a certainty. He wondered if Janet would feel very hipped about it, if ever he found a girl willing to make a match of it. Janet was splendid as a sister.

XXVIII

THERE were not many thoughts which Janet hid from her brother John. They were very frank and open with each other and could discuss almost anything in life without those reserves and hesitations which put a film over the eyes of human beings even, sometimes, if they share the same bed and breakfast. Janet's nature was not secretive anyhow, and instinctively she spoke her mind bluntly. There were one or two secret cupboards which she did not open to this good comrade of hers, but they had been locked ten years ago and she had put the key away in the deep hiding-places of her mind. Now, since Eric Pardoe had been a lodger in the house, that utter frankness with her brother had been a little spoilt because of certain distresses and yearnings which she had believed to be dead in her heart. That boy—so like those other boys who had gone down in the war—had excited her by bringing back regrets and half-forgotten hopes and painful memories. She was ashamed of herself because of this weakness, and shy of herself because she wondered if John with his watchful humorous eyes saw any change in her—this new happiness that had come to her in mothering his foundling, and this stirring up of emotional remembrance. All very silly for a woman of her age and just a little dangerous.

The danger of it, the absurdity of it, was revealed to her by one or two scenes she had with Eric before he went off suddenly to Nice, leaving her with a sense of desolation like a mother robbed of her first-born. He had made a scene—laughable really—about her friendship with Smudge that night when he had gone out into the rain and come back like a drowned rat, sulky and refusing his cocoa.

She was so afraid that he would get a bad cold after recovering from influenza. She had a horrid thought that he might die of pneumonia and even saw him carried out in his coffin. Anyhow,

it was a pity to waste that nice hot cocoa. John had gone to bed with a "good night, my dear, don't stay up reading!" She had waited until she had heard his door shut. Then she had slipped into the kitchen and put the cocoa on the tray and carried it upstairs. For a moment she had waited outside Eric's bedroom door, listening. He hadn't gone to bed yet. She could hear him moving about the room and he slammed a drawer shut, as though still angry about something. Then she knocked and called out "Eric!" just like an anxious mother worrying about a rebellious boy. For a moment or two he did not answer but then he strode across the room and opened his door. He was in his shirt and trousers with his braces hanging down, and his hair was ruffled.

"Drink this before you go to bed," said Janet. "It's piping hot."

"I don't want the filthy stuff," he answered sullenly.

Janet's face flushed and she looked at him angrily.

"Aren't you rather rude?"

He stared past her into the dimly lit passage, with a puckered frown, exactly like a naughty boy slightly ashamed of himself, and wondering whether he ought to drop his sulkiness.

"Yes," he admitted. "Hellishly rude. I'm frightfully sorry. I'm a horrible swine."

For the life of her Janet could not help smiling at him because of this sudden repentance.

"Well then, drink this up and don't be silly."

He took the cocoa from her and put it on the chest of drawers.

"Good night!" said Janet.

He did not answer that greeting but strode back again to the door with his thumbs between his braces.

"I can't think why you let that damned novelist come round so much," he growled resentfully.

"He happens to be my friend," explained Janet.

Eric Pardoe shrugged his shoulders.

"Anybody can see he wants to make love to you. He's just yearning for you and you pander to him. Listening to his self-conceit and all that. Praising his putrid work!"

"I like his work," said Janet coldly. "And please don't talk such utter drivel, Eric. It's not only silly. It's impudent."

That was straight hitting thoroughly deserved, and the boy blinked as if he had been struck between the eyes.

"Sorry," he said humbly. "Of course I haven't the slightest right—only I'm so damned jealous. I'm jealous even of that brother of yours. I can't bear it even when you laugh with the postman. Our friendship—and all that—has been so wonderful. I mean I just want all your sympathy for myself, and get hipped when you hand it out to the world."

"What rubbish!" laughed Janet. "How perfectly childish, Eric!"

"Well, that's how I feel," he said.

He caught hold of one of her hands and put it to his lips and she was tempted to kiss him on the forehead again—this weak boy of hers—but decided not to do so.

"Good night, and don't be so foolish."

In her own room she forgot to turn up the light and stood there in the darkness with smiling, luminous eyes, thinking of that sentimentalist divided from her by a thin partition. It was half an hour before his bed gave its final creak. She would have to be really cross with him unless he behaved himself better. It wouldn't be wise to say anything to John about it. He would be angry—or hilarious. . . .

Then there was another scene. It was when his Producer—"the Man with the Megaphone"—decided suddenly that he wanted Eric to go off to Nice with some of the company. It was a step up for Eric who was being taken out of the crowd to play an important part—a great chance which might lead to something rather splendid if he made a hit. But when Eric announced the news that evening—John was out with one of his patients—he said, "Of course, I shan't go!"

Janet stared at him in amazement.

"But Eric, of course you'll go! It's a chance of your life!"

"I'm damned if I'll go," he said obstinately.

"But why not, for goodness' sake?"

"I'm perfectly happy here," he protested. "Why should I have everything spoilt by hiking off to Nice? I shouldn't see you for six weeks or more. I should get all wrong again. Probably shoot myself or something. Blast the man!"

Janet spoke to him seriously. If he didn't go she would speak to John about it and have him turned out of the house and never speak to him again. It might be the beginning of a great career for him. The Producer had obviously taken a fancy to him—liked the look of his nose or something! And Nice was next door to Paradise. She only wished she had a chance of going to Nice, out of the east winds, with gorgeous sunshine and a cloudless sky, and bathing every day in a blue sea. What could be more wonderful?

"I want to stay here," said Eric. "I should feel like a lost soul without you. You're the only person in the world who understands me and doesn't despise me as a neurasthenic ass."

"Well, you've jolly well got to go," said Janet, "or I shall despise you as a neurasthenic worm."

"Curse!"

Eric jumped up from his seat on the hearthrug and paced up and down the room in a state of emotion which seemed to be half rage and half dejection.

"You'll be letting that novelist come round every night," he complained bitterly. "When I come back you'll have forgotten all about me. You won't care a damn. I shall be pushed out into the street. Back to Smith Street and a bed-sitting-room."

He had tears in his eyes, of rage or jealousy, and it was only when Janet laughed for quite a time at this ridiculous behaviour that his own sense of humour—none too strong—asserted itself so that he had to join in her laughter.

"I know I'm making a hopeless ass of myself," he admitted, "but what can a fellow do when he's as much in love with you as I am?"

It was the first time that he had spoken that fatal word, and Janet felt her heart give a lurch.

"Don't talk humbug, Eric," she pleaded. "For heaven's sake! I'm old enough to be your grandmother."

He didn't seem to think so. He admitted that she was a little older than he was—ten years, and what of it?—but that didn't make the slightest difference. On the contrary. He felt safe with her. She wasn't like those beastly little flappers whom he loathed so much—utterly heartless; as hard as pins; brainless. His love

for Janet was a kind of worship. She made him want to get decent and straight with himself; to be something better than a worm. She had cured him of suicidal tendencies. He might do something good in the world if he had her help. And anyhow, he loved her and he would feel most frightfully grateful if she would give him a kiss now and then.

Janet knew that her face had gone white. She could feel the sudden coldness of her hands. And she could hardly breathe because her heart seemed too big for her suddenly. She was afraid of this boy's love—desperately afraid that she might have done something to lead him on—by her laughter, her little jokes, her sympathy, her liking for him, her wish to mother him.

"Eric," she said, "oh, my dear! I'm much too old for you! You mustn't talk like that. . . . It hurts me."

It hurt her terribly because she had once loved a boy like Eric, and had wanted love so much before he was killed. After that she had put love away from her mind.

She wept a little, unable to check her tears, and Eric was frightened and put his arms about her as she stood by the mantelpiece with her back to him.

"I'm most frightfully sorry, Janet. . . . Please forgive me! . . . Of course you despise me as a hopeless blighter. . . . I'll go off to Nice and do that job. . . . Please don't cry! Please!"

He knelt down before her in his worshipful love and leaned his forehead against her knees, until she kissed his hair very lightly and made him get up because John was coming in at the front door.

For the next two days she arranged matters so that she should not be alone much with Eric, and as he came home late from the studio it was not too difficult. She packed his things while he was away, and bought some new razor blades for him because she noticed that he had let some of the others get rusty—with his usual carelessness!—and mended his socks which were wearing rather thin. Only once or twice she smiled into his eyes as much as to say "Cheer up!" because he looked so gloomy. Otherwise she used her long eyelashes to hide her shyness from him after his outburst of nonsense. The night before his departure he tapped at her bedroom door, and when she opened it she found him in his pyjamas and an old dressing-gown roped round his waist.

"I don't think I'll go after all," he announced. "I hate the idea of it."

That made her angry so that she bullied him until he went back to his room crushed and sorry for himself. Even John noticed his dejection at breakfast next morning, and chaffed him for looking so blue before such an enchanting adventure.

"Some people have all the luck and don't seem to know it. I wish to heaven I could do a few weeks on the Riviera! Glorious sunshine, my lad! Snow-capped mountains! The playground of the idle rich!"

"Not so far as I'm concerned," growled Eric. "I don't suppose I'll see the sun. It will be studio work the whole damn' time."

"Don't you believe it," said John cheerfully. "We shall see photographs of you in the picture papers. Famous film star basking on the Côte d'Azur."

Janet saw him off at the station, being late for once at her hat shop. She felt like a mother who sees her boy off to boarding-school, aware of his homesickness and with an ache in her own heart.

"Good luck!" shouted John as he slammed the door of the taxi cab.

"Thanks," said Eric.

He sat silently in the cab for that short journey to Victoria Station and answered Janet in monosyllables when she asked whether he had his passport and tickets and ready money for the journey. Yes, everything.

"I don't see why I should be pushed off like this," he said bitterly, as the taxi swung round into the station yard.

"I shan't write to you if you talk like that," she threatened.

On the platform his little crowd had already gathered and they greeted him with friendly enthusiasm.

"Hullo, Eric! Hurry up, laddie! . . . The Blue Train doesn't wait for late sleepers. . . . The child has actually shaved himself this morning!"

There were two girls of Eric's age, quite pretty, in frocks suitable for the Riviera and hats to match. It was a pity they had used their lipsticks too freely, thought Janet, though she liked the

look of them. One of them put her hand on Eric's arm and said "Beautiful boy!" and laughed when he moved away from her after a chill "Good morning?" There were also three young men in light overcoats and very wide trousers and pale blue hats, extremely hearty.

"Thank God we shall get away from this climate!" said one of them ecstatically.

"But oh, the Channel crossing!" remarked another, and his simple words were greeted with loud laughter from the rest of the company.

Then there was a tall, tired-looking man who was busy with tickets and papers at the barrier.

"That's Braithwaite," said Eric. "Blast him!"

So that was the Producer whom he hated so much—the Man with the Megaphone—the slave-driver. Janet was surprised to find him quite human in appearance, and even attractive, with a lean, pleasant-looking face, with a touch of grey at his temples and mild eyes behind "horners."

"Hullo, Pardoe," he said presently. "You look as though a few weeks' sunshine would do you good."

He raised his hat slightly to Janet and looked as though he wondered if she were Eric's sister, but decided against that theory. No family likeness between that dark lady and this fair-haired boy.

"I'm giving Pardoe a great chance," he remarked in a friendly way. "I've cast him for some first-class scenes. If he can show a touch of passion——"

"Oh, I'm sure he can," said Janet, feeling that it was up to her to give Eric a friendly word. Then, quite absurdly, she blushed when Mr. Braithwaite laughed at her enthusiasm.

"Perhaps you know!" he suggested without undue emphasis.

There was a move towards the train. A guard was saying "Take your seats, please!" Eric was the last of his company to remain on the platform.

"Good-bye, and good luck!" said Janet.

She could not refuse his kiss, and for the first time kissed him on the lips because of the yearning in his eyes.

A whistle blew and he disappeared into the coach of the Blue Train, and Janet walked away down the platform with a strange

churning-up of emotion in her heart. Ten years ago she had seen another boy off from this platform. It was Jack Lavington when he first went out to the front. Perhaps that was why she had a sharp pain inside her—because of this remembrance of a boy now dead whom she had loved very much. Yet it was something to do with Eric, some mix-up of ideas which she could hardly interpret to herself. That evening in Walpole Street before John came home—and afterwards—she felt lonely without their lodger. It would be nice to have him back again, if he wouldn't be so sentimental. Well, he would get over that. One of those little actress girls. . . .

XXIX

DOCTOR JEVONS of Walpole Street was getting to know more about life than ever he had learnt as a ship's doctor between Liverpool and West Africa, as other doors were opened to him in the secret city where people live in hiding from their neighbours.

He felt sometimes that he was watching a "movie" drama like one of those in the Picture Palace along the King's Road. The Producer had a sense of comedy and put whimsical types on the screen, showing them in their bedrooms and back parlours. He turned the spot light. He switched it on to Cockney humorists like some of those chauffeurs in Pavilion Road, and on to the lineal descendants of Nym and Bardolph and Pistol—old Falstaff's knaves—who were "on the dole" and never did a stroke of honest work and never wanted to. His camera took snapshots of pavement artists and street beggars who lived on the sentiment of the crowd and made a fair living at the game when the weather was worst. He gave "close-ups" of shabby gentlemen related to Mr. Jingle and living at Rowton House, where they cooked their kippers and washed their socks as long as they could provide a shilling a night for this Hotel Cecil of the down-and-outs. The Producer of this *comédie humaine* changed the scene with infinite variety, now showing elegant interiors of the modern world of luxury, now turning the lens to some slum basement where a family of five or six was crowded into one room. This Director of the London Scenario delighted in sudden contrasts—here a little lady in silk pyjamas in a gilded bed, there an old woman dying on a mattress without a ragged blanket over her old bones. After a touch of comedy there was sharp transition to tragedy. After birth—death; or sickness and despair worse than death, and more pitiable. This Master-mind delighted in fine scenic effects, with an artist's eye for light and atmosphere—London by night with sky-signs winking out of the

darkness; London at dawn under a flushed sky; London glittering in sunshine with a tide of metal flowing down golden streets. The greatest "movie" in the world, entitled "Civilisation."

That queer flight of imagination passed through the doctor's mind one day and made him smile to himself in a busy street. But it wasn't true exactly. It wasn't so dramatic as all that, nor so strongly focussed. The life of a general practitioner had drab days and many uninteresting cases, and a commonplace routine. Only now and then did he come across something startling or unusual. Perhaps his brain was made in a way that enabled him to get more interest out of life than most people because of a sympathy which put him into touch with their minds. What odd things went on in some of the minds he met! Many of these people who appeared so ordinary if one passed them in the street retired into little rooms where they lived in an extraordinary world of their own, wholly unrelated to reality, or perhaps more real than what we call reality.

There was a lady spiritualist to whom he was called one day in Tedworth Square with its old brown houses—shabby-genteel—after an accident in a taxicab which had cut her face. She was quite merry and bright—a laughing lady who made light of this mishap. She had known it was going to happen, she told him. Dear Jane had told her that she would be hurt in a cab because an evil spirit possessed the driver. Yes, dear Jane Welsh Carlyle, who often spoke to her. She was standing behind Dr. Jevons now. Couldn't he see her? Why, the room was crowded with spirits who talked to her when she was alone. There was Rossetti who had told her to paint a portrait of the Blessed Virgin. She had never touched a brush in her life before. And there was the portrait, painted under spirit control. . . .

Certainly very remarkable, in the opinion of Dr. Jevons who was a bit of an artist himself, and in spite of his sense of humour he began to feel uneasy in this room with the laughing lady. There was something oppressive in its atmosphere—there were unusual vibrations about him—unless his imagination was at work. . . . He laughed at the effect of suggestion on his own mind. It showed again how powerful it was. Almost irresistible!

In a bed-sitting-room in Radnor Street, which is not a highway

of fashion, there was an ex-officer addressing envelopes at so much a thousand. He had commanded a battery of artillery in the Great War and was still feeling the effect of an old wound. Desperately poor now, he was not unhappy, it seemed, because of a new study which absorbed his interest and his thoughts, even when his hand and part of his mind were slaving at those addresses.

"You see, Doctor," he explained, "the world is approaching the Last Phase of Tribulation. There's going to be an almighty smash—it's all foretold in the Pyramid—but the English-speaking people are coming out on top—thank God! I suppose you know we are the British Israelites—descended from the Lost Tribes? It's as plain as a pikestaff if one reads the old prophecies, and I get a lot of fun out of it. Makes life interesting!"

To this ex-major of a field battery in the war we call Great, the trivial episodes of contemporary politics, the unemployed problem in England, even the discomforts of a bed-sitting-room in Radnor Street were of no account compared with the enormous drama working in his mind when the whole world was to be flung into chaos according to the prophecies and only he and other British Israelites looking out on ruin would be able to say "We told you so!" A strange form of spiritual comfort, but he got a lot of fun out of it. It was his escape from this dug-out in peace time.

There was an old gentleman in Eaton Square who had once kept eight servants besides his valet and butler. Now, owing to income tax and financial losses, he lived in the same house, with a charlady to do for him, and the valet who had withered in his service. The window curtains were seldom washed. Dust had settled on the mahogany furniture which had been put there in Early Victorian days. Damp and mildew had attacked the portraits of old admirals and generals of the Georgian era, and in the library where the old gentleman spent most of his days there was a mousey, musty, moth-eaten smell mingled with the aroma of books and parchments. The world was roaring on its way. The buses were lurching down Sloane Street. Lorries laden with supplies for the devouring appetite of London were taking a short cut through Eaton Square where once only the broughams of the old gentility passed at a quiet pace. A war had pulled down kings and dynasties and changed the minds of men, cracking the foundations of social

life, breaking up the old conventions. But here, unperturbed by all that racket, a little old gentleman sat writing a book on butterflies—*The Lesser-Known Lepidoptera*—until one morning he reached for a volume on a shelf above his head and turned a little giddy and fell face downwards on his Turkey carpet. There he lay until John Jevons of Walpole Street, who happened to be passing by, was called in by the white-haired valet running in search of the nearest doctor.

In a flat above a greengrocer's shop in the King's Road lived a maiden lady of middle age who devoted her life to the reformation of slaughter houses by little pamphlets printed at her own expense and addressed to politicians.

In a mews off Sloane Avenue was the prophet of a new religion based upon an original interpretation of the Apocalypse.

At the back of an antique furniture shop in Manor Street dwelt a stout old lady who studied Theosophy in her spare time and proclaimed herself as the reincarnation of Cleopatra.

In a studio down Flood Street, Chelsea, was an elderly painter who indulged in automatic writing and produced manuscripts dictated by the spirit of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

There seemed to be numbers of people in London, judging from the limited experience of one doctor, who had curious beliefs of that kind—strange dream worlds of their own—in an age of scepticism and scientific progress. They had escaped from narrow imprisoning sects of Christian dogma into vague, nebulous regions in which they found the spectres of primitive superstitions or wandered out to the dark No Man's Land of supernormal faculties and the border-line of the supernatural. After evenings with ghosts, spirit-voices, dreams and fantasies they joined the world of men and women next morning through the swing doors of Government offices in Whitehall, or banks in the city, or little shops in King's Road, Chelsea, and there was nothing about them to hint at that secret life of theirs except perhaps a "distant" look in their eyes and a quietude of speech.

There was a Christian Scientist lady who resented the doctor's visit, demanded by her husband because she had a tumour in the breast.

"I'm only allowing you to examine me because of that silly

old husband of mine," she exclaimed. "He worries himself to death about me, and utterly refuses to believe that all disease is a sin against the spirit of Christ and that it doesn't exist if one's faith is strong. Mr. Titchley over there is giving me silent treatment—dear man!—though as a matter of fact there is nothing the matter with me except a touch of selfishness."

Mr. Titchley over there was a gentleman in a frock-coat who looked like a grocer in his Sunday clothes—eminently respectable, with a beard under his chin. His lips were moving slightly and his eyes were shut.

The lady's husband spoke to Dr. Jevons in the hall.

"Of course, my wife is utterly mad! This Christian Science stuff! My God! As for old Titchley, I want to strangle him. A hypocrite of the worst type, and makes a good thing out of duping silly women. . . . How about the tumour, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid she'll have to be operated on," said John. "I'd like to have an X-ray examination."

"I'm afraid she'll never allow it," said the husband.

She never did allow it, but some weeks afterwards the doctor met her husband again in Sloane Street outside a bookseller's shop where he was studying the latest titles.

"How is Lady Mickledean?" asked John, standing beside him. "I'm sorry she wouldn't let me examine her again."

The husband seemed to have something on his mind which he could hardly put into words. He went purple in the face and his eyes bulged with some intensity of emotion.

"Well," said Sir John Mickledean, who was once of the Indian Civil Service and a gentleman of the old school, "I hardly like to tell you, Doctor. It's unbelievable, really. Preposterous! Not that I believe in Christian Science or any nonsense of that sort. Good God, no! Still I must confess that my wife is as well as ever she was. Something queer happened. That tumour vanished. Unaccountable!"

"You don't say so!" said John.

But he did say so, and a doctor in Walpole Street had to believe him, and walked up Sloane Street with raised eyebrows. Unaccountable, certainly! Another faith cure. But that didn't explain the mystery. Intense auto-suggestion? . . . Again no explana-

tion. Was there any limit to the power of the mind over the body? He was beginning to believe that the limit had a much wider range than most people dreamed of. Coué had been a miracle worker, in spite of all who scoffed at his simple ideas. "Every day in every way"—it sounded silly, but it did the trick sometimes. The cases in Baudoin's book were pretty marvellous. It was narrow-minded of the medical faculty not to take advantage of such knowledge—not to use suggestion as a definite method of healing, far more efficacious than most drugs. In a way they did—the bedside manner, the harmless bottle of medicine with a little faith added—nine times out of ten it was the only treatment that did any good. But why not use suggestion for all it was worth and establish it as a special science? Psychotherapy was regarded as the worst form of quackery. Perhaps if they called it mind-healing it would not seem so sinister and mysterious to intelligent people. Jung had explored the secret recesses of human psychology. That was the line of advance—to get to know the workings of the human mind and its relation to the body, and its adaptation to environment, and the hidden conflicts which resulted in abnormalities, nervous crises, moral disasters.

Doctor Jevons made a note of these odd cases on the tablets of his mind. One day he might find a place for them in his psychological survey of London life. But he was more interested really in the normal than in the abnormal, if there is any such thing as normality in the human brain, which he was beginning to doubt. Rather he was interested in the life of the crowd who tried to adjust themselves somehow to the strains and stresses of this civilisation and made a fair job of it, though they needed help sometimes. If only he could help here and there.

XXX

NOW and then John was dragged off by his sister to the houses of some of her smart friends in South Audley Street and other places beyond his own frontiers. Janet thought it was "good for him" to get away from Chelsea once in a while and put on his evening clothes which were getting creased in a bottom drawer. At least that was the reason she gave for accepting an invitation to one of Lady Ide's receptions (dancing 11-2), though John with the watchful eyes thought that she looked a little lonely now that she had lost that boy Eric for a time as an object of satire for her sense of humour.

It was a bit of an ordeal, that reception at Lady Ide's, for a man who had to get his sister to fix up his dress tie and who felt uneasy in a white waistcoat with enamel buttons.

"Humiliating to one's self-respect," he remarked gloomily. "It's like a savage putting on his war paint."

To which Janet replied, "Rubbish, Jacko! Don't pretend it's the first time you've put on evening clothes. You look superb. Like Jack Buchanan at his best and noblest."

There was an awning up in Cadogan Square and a red carpet to the kerbstone, and Police Constable Widgery was on duty to keep the cars moving and watch out for cat burglars.

He saluted the doctor from Walpole Street and passed a humorous word or two, *sotto voce*. "Didn't do this sort of thing in Bourlon Wood, Doctor!"

"Perhaps it's more dangerous here," suggested John.

He was very much tickled by that remark, was Police Constable Widgery, and guffawed behind his white glove.

"Well, I wouldn't be surprised! For single men, as you might say. . . . Now pass along there with that Rolls-Royce."

There was quite a crush up the staircase, beyond which stood Lady Ide, just inside the drawing-room, in a puffed frock of white

silk, short in front and long at the sides and not much to it above the waist-line. So had she stood, gracefully poised with her head a little on one side, on the top stairs of a long flight back-stage at the Empire, twenty-five years before, with the spot light on her slim figure. "Dulcie Devereux," the darling of the gods, and not a day older now in outward image, unless one stood quite close to her and saw the faint crows' feet beneath the enamel and the shrunken neck beneath a coiled rope of pearls.

"Isn't she marvellous!" said a girl, so close to John that he could feel her hip bone through her thin frock jammed against his side. "She must have had her face lifted!"

That remark was addressed to a young man with oiled hair on the step below her.

"I wouldn't shout it on the house-tops, dear child. She might hear."

"Not in this jamboree," said the girl with a careless laugh.

"Who is our hostess to-night, Billy?" asked another young lady slightly in front of the doctor and Janet. "It's always well to know."

"Well, to tell you the honest truth ——"

The youth ahead was baffled for a moment.

"Oh Lord, yes! Cynthia Ide's people. I think her father owns a lot of pubs or something. He must be Lord Somebody if that's so. Anyhow, there'll be some decent drinks going, thank God."

"See that girl in blue?" remarked a young man with a monocle

"Yes. Next to the old bird with a bald head."

"That's Winifred Western. She must have come on from the Gaiety. Rather a peach, don't you think?"

"Too much bloom for the time of year. A bit over-ripe in my opinion. . . . Oh, catty, I know!"

Odd how these young people talked to each other regardless of their neighbours, in loud voices, as though each Jack and Jill were alone on a desert island!

A butler bearing a remarkable resemblance to the late Archbishop of Canterbury, announced the names.

"Lady Lettice Errington and Mr. Julian Dart."

"Lord Victor Mickleham and Miss Christine Farley."

"Miss Winifred Western."

"Dr. Jevons. Miss Jevons."

The doctor's hand was clasped and held by Lady Ide and he marvelled at the smoothness and youthfulness of her powdered arm. A young woman's arm. A lover might kiss it even now with rapture! Cynthia Ide's mother, looking like her daughter's sister! The clock of time had altered its beat. Youth had a long innings—and why not?

"So delightful of you to come. . . . I love those naughty eyebrows of yours, Doctor. So wicked!"

"Lord and Lady Mervyn."

John's hand was liberated. Lady Ide greeted her next guests with a cry of delight.

"My dear children! How *sweet* of you! So soon after your honeymoon. . . . I hope he's been kind to you, my angel? No Bluebeard's Cupboard?"

"Oh, quite polite!"

"You dear wretches! How I envy you! Love. Youth. The Italian lakes. Oh, you *greedy* darlings!"

Sir Francis Ide was standing further back in the drawing-room. His eyes were slightly bloodshot, but he looked handsome, florid and good-natured. He shook hands with John and Janet, but seemed doubtful about them.

"Haven't I met you before somewhere?" he asked John without pretence.

Then he remembered before the answer came.

"Oh, yes. A doctor. . . . Glad to see you again."

Then he turned to Janet and seemed to like the look of her.

"You'll find Cynthia about somewhere—if you can find young Basil Hyde. I expect you know more people here than I do. They drift in and out. The boys bring their girls. The girls bring their boys. Half the time they don't know who the devil I am. Why should they?"

The doctor and his sister made their way further into the room, standing silently among this crowd of youngish people among whom were a few elderly men and women hard to place.

"The ruins after the war," thought John. "The older aristocracy, glad of a free supper. Unless they're managers of picture palaces, or the people in charge of the box offices."

The younger crowd talked to each other in high-pitched voices as though in a gale of wind. They called each other's names through gaps in the crowd. "Hullo, Billy!" . . . "Hullo, Funny-Face!" . . . "Hullo, Joan!"

There was a room beyond through an arched doorway from which the doors had been removed, and above the heads of shingled haired girls the doctor from Walpole Street saw dancing feet on polished boards and a kaleidoscope of silk frocks and coloured stockings, and now and then the face of a tall girl looking down on the oiled hair of some youth a size too small for her. Grenadiers, some of those girls! The men on the whole looked weedy compared with them. In the next war—well, no good thinking of that! That jazz band was making the noise of a dozen devils. The artist with the saxophone was certainly possessed of a diabolical spirit. It was pathological, really, this dancing mania and that music. It was a form of drugging. Hardly one of them seemed to get any pleasure out of it. On the contrary, it seemed to produce an effect of profound melancholy in most of these young people, a kind of stupefied langour such as an opium smoker might feel if he kept moving to some mechanical rhythm. Only a few of them seemed to be really amused. Probably it was a pleasing and faintly sensuous form of exercise. His sister had given him a trial now and then to a gramophone tune, but he hadn't made much headway.

"Have a dance, John!" suggested Janet with an elusive smile.

"Not in these trousers!" he answered in the old Army slang.

She didn't press him. Presently she gave a deep drawn sigh and John felt her hand on his arm.

"It makes me feel old," she remarked. "Most of Cynthia's friends escaped the war. They were in their nurseries when you and I were out in France, John."

"Lucky for them," said John.

He glanced at the passing faces. A good-looking crowd on the whole, he thought, rather different from those girls who hopped off buses in Sloane Square on their way to hat shops and cash chemists, or city offices and typewriters. Not so alert, perhaps. Not so alive. Not so amused with life. Some of these girls looked languid and bored. Some of these boys looked even more bored—

too bored even to dance, so that they stood around smoking cigarettes in a moody aloof way. Still it didn't do to generalise. Here, as a matter of fact, was one of the shop girls. It was Nina Ziborova with very bright eyes and her long smiling mouth. She hadn't torn her frock off yet but had gone rather far towards it. Not unenchanting, those alabaster shoulders with little white ribbons to keep up her kilt. Police Constable Widgery would think her dangerous, and quite right too. And there was that dainty witch from the Lyric Theatre who had lost her voice one day—Joan Wittington, as a lady of the town from *The Beggar's Opera* in a puffed dress of sprigged muslin, looking fragrant.

"In Moscow my mother gave parties like this," said Nina Ziborova. "At one of them I ate too many ices and was sick over the uniform of an Imperial Hussar."

"I must get a nice fellow to take you down to supper," said John. "This white waistcoat——"

Nina Ziborova slapped his hand with a titter of laughter, and John strolled with her to the edge of the dancing floor. It was then that he saw Cynthia for the first time that evening. The jazz band was playing a new tune with a slow beat—the Blues—and the saxophonist was making goblin-like cackles. To that queer melody, suggestive of some secret rite in a West African forest rather than a party in Cadogan Square, Cynthia moved round the room with Basil Hyde. That young man was talking to her earnestly, with his face very close to hers and with a kind of tenderness—a caress—in his eyes which was unlike his usual expression of slightly satirical boredom. As she passed, the doctor saw Cynthia's face flush vividly. Then the colour ebbed away, leaving her pale. She was smiling with her lips, but John thought he saw a look of anxiety or distress of some kind in this girl's eyes.

"That charming child looks unwell to-night," said Nina Ziborova. "It is perhaps the heat of these rooms. . . . Pouff!"

Lady Ide had come into the dancing-room with a dark young man who took the floor with her, winding his way skilfully through the moving crowd, while her white arm rested on his shoulder and her rope of pearls—worth a lot of money!—was pressed against his short front. Dulcie Devereux could give some of these girls a lesson in dancing. With that lissom young snake she

moved with a rhythm that was good to watch. "A dance a day keeps old age away," Dr. Jevons of Walpole Street had read in some advertisement, and agreed that there might be something in it bad for his trade.

"That's Lady Ide's lounge-lizard," remarked a girl close to him. She was speaking to a young man on his left by the doorway. "She brings him to the Savoy quite a lot. Poisonous, isn't he?" "Pestilential!"

Cynthia came up after the dance and Nina kissed her on both cheeks effusively. She seemed pleased to see John and Janet, but was taken away from them after a few minutes by other people who were eager for her recognition. John wondered whether any of the members of her Suicide Club were here—those men who accused her of wrecking their careers. He suspected a good-looking fellow with the shoulders of a rowing man who watched her from the doorway moodily, and nodded in a hostile way to Basil Hyde who passed with some excitement in his eyes.

John lost Janet, who knew some of the crowd here. Later he saw her dancing with a soldierly looking bloke. It was not very amusing after an hour to a doctor who was just a little out of it in this company. He wandered round into other rooms. In one of them Sir Francis Ide was drinking whiskey with a group of his own—four or five city men—they looked like city men—who were telling funny stories with gusts of loud laughter and watchful eyes on the doorway if ladies passed.

Working off their Freudian libido, thought the doctor from Walpole Street. It seemed to him strange that civilisation in Cadogan Square should be such a weak barrier against the beast that lurked in the underworld of the human mind, with its polygamous instincts and animal humours.

"That's a good one, Franky! It's a new one to me, old boy!"

"Better shut that door, Jumbo," suggested Sir Francis Ide, with a nervous glance outside.

The crowd was drifting down to the supper room, but John, without a partner, preferred a cigarette and opened the door of Sir Francis Ide's study—that room at the end of the hall where he had first talked with Cynthia's father. He was amazed to find Cynthia there quite alone. She had slipped away from her friends

and was standing by the fireplace dabbing her eyes which seemed to be wet.

"Sorry!" said John, feeling embarrassed for a moment. "Headache or something?"

She held out her hand and laughed and then cried with a little gust of tears.

"It's idiotic of me!" she said. "I mustn't let people see."

"I'll hold the door," said John. "They'll have to walk over my dead body——"

She dabbed her eyes again with an inadequate handkerchief, so that John felt sorry for her and pulled out his own, which was more useful for mopping-up purposes.

"It's absurd!" she said presently. "It's all because I've promised to marry Basil. I suppose I must marry *somebody*, so I've said all right to Basil."

"Well," said John, smiling at her, "you don't seem very happy about it!"

He didn't feel very happy about it himself. For just a second of imbecility he was aware of a queer ache in his left side, a sudden pang of disappointment and distress. This tall slim girl, so flower-like, so very charming, had walked through his day-dreams sometimes. In a most unprofessional way—quite inexcusable—he had gone to meet her in Chelsea Gardens. Somehow he had allowed himself to think of her outside his practice, as an exquisite type of girlhood, alluring to some deep-lying romanticism in his own mentality, utterly unsuspected by himself but awakened lately by some touch of passion that had startled him so that he had said "Physician, heal thyself!" in a sense of alarm. How foolish of him! How careful one ought to be of one's day-dreams!

"I dare say I'll get used to the idea," she told him, laughing again and getting the better of her weepiness. "I shall have to put a good face on it."

She put a good face on it when he took her down to supper, and he admired the astonishing way in which she concealed even a trace of that recent distress, with a gaiety which seemed unaffected. Basil was on the other side of the table and kissed his glass to her before he drank, smiling into her eyes.

"I wonder if he will make her happy?" thought John, watching

him observantly. "I wonder if he's all right—that Beau Brummel of hers."

He was just a little too sleek, a touch too elegant, with that black hair of his over-oiled. Yet John had known men like this—exactly that type—as cool as cucumbers under shell-fire, insolent and supercilious in places where Death went walking. One couldn't judge a man harshly because he oiled his hair, or despise his type because of foppishness.

One of the footmen leaned over John's chair.

"A message on the telephone, sir. Will you go to Number 30, Moore Street—very urgent."

"Hard luck, Doctor!" said Cynthia. "Hard luck on your friends, I mean."

She gave him her hand again over the table, and he raised it to his lips, ignoring the laughter of Nina Ziborova who said, "A Russian privilege, Doctor!"

"See you later, Jacko!" said Janet, raising her hand in a military salute.

Outside the Ide's house a hundred cars or more were parked round the railings—quite a lot of wealth in Daimlers and Rolls-Royces, with here and there a Baby Austin or a Morris-Oxford among the nobility of their species. A nice night with a clear sky and a crescent moon, silvering the lamp-posts and the chimney cowl. At Number 30, Moore Street a girl was dying of pneumonia beyond the sound of revelry in Cadogan Square where that saxophone was wailing its goblin-like cacophonies to tall young beauties on the polished floors. Another contrast of the London scenario by the great Producer!

XXXI

JANET was excited by the announcement of Cynthia's engagement which appeared in *The Times* and occupied some space with photographs and gossip notes in the picture papers. She looked across the coffee-pot one morning after glancing at a letter from Eric with the Nice postmark and deciding to read it later, and more privately.

"John! do you see about Cynthia? She's going to marry Basil."

"I know," said John in a casual voice. "She told me so. At that orgy the other night."

Janet regarded him with some astonishment.

"Why on earth didn't you tell me, Jacko?"

It hadn't occurred to John to tell her.

"I wasn't sure she wanted me to spread the glad tidings. It's her affair, after all."

Janet was silent for some minutes and then looked furtively at her brother with a faint elusive smile.

"Several nice men will be sorry!"

"Very likely," answered John rather curtly. He regretted that curtness. Instead of reading his morning paper he wondered why he should have spoken like that. Was it possible that he should really feel disgruntled because Cynthia Ide—one of his patients—had become engaged to a friend of hers? It only showed how one's intellectual controls are weakened sometimes by unconscious impulses. He would have to keep a more careful watch on himself.

"Any sensational news from Adonis?" he asked presently, in a friendly voice to make amends for that vexation.

"I haven't looked," said Janet self-consciously. "The child writes reams. I have to read them in leisure hours."

Yes, John had noticed that she carried off those letters for more

leisure than the breakfast table gave, though now and then she read out bits which she thought might interest him.

Yound Pardoe had a gift for description. He had given an amusing account of the Promenade des Anglais with its parade of elderly colonels and their wives who had let their flats in Belgravia and found themselves rubbing shoulders with French deputies and their little lady friends from Paris. He had also described a *thé dansant* at the Negresco—"that fantastic 'pub' with bronze ladies at its portals who looked as if they had been sun-bathing and had left their peignoirs on the sand."

At the film studios the crowd was largely made up of Russian *émigrés* who were all princes and princesses—according to rumour—but glad to earn a few francs a day by hanging round in chance of a job. The two girls whom Janet had met on the platform were very distressing, he found. Always talking sex and shop—both of which subjects he disliked. The Man with the Megaphone was fairly civil, and was slightly less blasphemous in his language now that he bathed once a day. Probably it was a relationship between cleanliness and godliness. Or perhaps the sun was acting on his spleen with beneficial results.

And so on, vividly touched in, but with an underlying cynicism which seemed to be the note of his mind and type.

One morning an enormous cardboard box arrived from Nice addressed to Janet, and she opened it with a sharp cry of ecstasy.

"Oh, John! How divine!"

It was a miracle of colour and scent which filled the breakfast-room of that little house in Walpole Street. Here were masses of carnations, deep red, or faintly flushed, or snow white. And here were garlands of mimosa like golden rain, and best of all long sprigs of lilac, lovely and fragrant.

"It must have cost that boy a fortune!" exclaimed John.

"He just doesn't bother about money," said Janet. "But these flowers blot out everything. This scent is like a waft of Paradise."

She put her face down into the carnations so that they made her cheeks wet, and some glint from that golden mimosa shone in her eyes.

Before going to the hat shop that morning while John was still engrossed in *The Times* she slipped out of the house with some

of those flowers, and walked very fast to Sloane Square, where she stopped for a few minutes on some purpose of her own which made her glance round shyly lest people should observe her. But no one took any notice while she put the flowers in the empty pots on the base of the war memorial—that tall white cross with the golden sword. A stream of people on their way to the Underground halted to buy their morning papers from the stand there. The traffic lurched round the asphalt pavement, wet after a sharp shower which had unveiled the sun. There was a scamper of Russian boots below silk clad knees for omnibus 16A, going eastwards. The blind man by the bookshop was lighting his first pipe.

 Their lives to their country
 Their souls to their God.

The letters, cut deep on the base of the war memorial, were above the red and white carnations, which Janet had put in the empty pots, before hurrying on to her hat shop.

XXXII

DOCTOR JEVONS found now and then odd links between the lives of some of his patients. It was curious, for instance, that he should have found a photograph of Sir Francis Ide on the mantelpiece of a bedroom in Royal Avenue. And the inhabitant of the bedroom was connected with a friend of his who stood in his imagination for Law and Order, plus the tradition of the trenches carried over into peace-time with the humour of his old crowd—namely, Police Constable Widgery. It was as a matter of fact, Jack Widgery's wife's sister who happened to have the photograph of Sir Francis Ide on her bedroom mantelpiece when he called to see her one evening during the influenza epidemic. Her mother, Mrs. Dix, let lodgings in Royal Avenue, though the house was small. The drawing-room and a bedroom upstairs were let to an old lady in reduced circumstances but very highly connected.

She was a very charming old lady, getting on for ninety, who had to be watched rather carefully because she forgot how old she was and set out sometimes to visit friends in London who had long been dead, and was confused, and a little angry, when pert maid-servants assured her that no such person lived in these houses though she had been there scores of times, some time ago. Could it be fifty years? Then she forgot her own address in Royal Avenue, believing firmly that she lived in Eaton Square. However, she was generally brought back by friendly young women after a reference to letters in her handbag. She gave no other trouble to Mrs. Dix beyond losing her spectacles in the oddest places—how did they get into the dog kennel?—and she spent most of her days reading the announcements of births, marriages and deaths in *The Times*, and wondering whether a Westmacott who had had a baby was related to the dear Westmacotts she had known in Somerset eighty years ago, when she was quite a child; or whether a certain Phillimore,

who had died of pneumonia, was the son, or the grandson, or perhaps the great-grandson—astonishing this flight of time!—of a boy who had made love to her before he became somewhat later in life a Bishop—though she always remembered him as a boy and really couldn't think of him as a Bishop at all!

On the first floor Mrs. Dix had let the rooms to a young gentleman named Thistledown who was a journalist, and worked very late sometimes, and had his meals at odd hours—rather troublesome—unless he went round to the Blue Cockatoo, or Mulberry Cottage restaurant, with other young men and women who sometimes invaded his rooms and played the gramophone when they ought to have been in bed.

Mrs. Dix, who was a widow, slept in the basement next to the kitchen, and Phyllis had a little bedroom at the very top of the house—not a high one—next to the maid-servant's. Here it was that John was brought in by an anxious mother and found a pretty girl with a high temperature and other symptoms of the malignant microbe.

"Well, I'll leave you, Doctor," said Mrs. Dix. "Mr. Thistledown will be wanting his supper. . . . Now, Phyllis, darling, tell the doctor everything."

There was nothing much to tell though Phyllis Dix was quite talkative. At least a third of the staff in her department—Gosports in the Brompton Road—was down with the beastly old 'flu. She had been jolly glad when Mr. Hobbs—one of the shopwalkers—had sneezed his head off and gone off duty. It gave the girls a bit of peace. Always reporting them for nothing at all! Then three of the young men in the gentlemen's haberdashery had gone missing, and then it pounced on the Pyjamas—the department she meant—and spread to the leather goods. Perfectly absurd how they all caught it! The place simply reeked with eucalyptus. It made her laugh, although it meant a lot more work behind the counter doing the job of other girls and getting the prices all wrong.

Of course, she had asked for it by going to the Palais de Danse the other night. She was just mad on dancing and didn't like to disappoint a gentleman friend, though she felt a bit headachey. Two of the professionals kept coughing all the time, and one of the girls who get hired out for ninepence—poor little beasts—fainted

in the arms of a boy from Stamford Hill who let her down with a bump. It was frightfully funny, really, only it reminded her of the Great Plague of London which she had read about in a book—and seen on the pictures, too—"Bring out your dead" and all that; and then she felt weak at the knees and could hardly get on top of a bus although she had Russian boots on because of the mud. Now she felt aches in every part of her body, and her head was just splitting. Oh, she had got the 'flu all right, she supposed!

"I'm afraid you have," said John, after listening to this recitative by a girl with a flushed face and a full pouting mouth—"Cherry-ripe"—and very bright blue-grey eyes with a merry look in them—one of those thousands of girls who hurried past him down the King's Road on their way to work and home again, and a pretty specimen of her type and class—rather unusually pretty, he thought, though they were all a good-looking crowd.

"What a horrid nuisance!" exclaimed Phyllis Dix. "I suppose I shall have to stay indoors?"

John laughed at her.

"Not a doubt about that. And you must keep yourself warm in bed, until I let you escape. Do you think your mother can provide a hot-water bottle?"

There didn't seem to be any trouble about that, but Phyllis raised a red rag of rebellion when he told her that she would have to stay in bed for at least a week, unless she wanted pneumonia and other complications.

"A week? Oh, that's impossible! I have an engagement with a gentleman friend on Friday night."

"Sorry!" said John, "but your gentleman friend is going to be disappointed if I have anything to say about it."

"I simply must get out on Friday night," protested Phyllis. "Even if it rains cats and dogs. I've been looking forward to it for ages. It's a fancy-dress dance at the Albert Hall. I wouldn't miss it for anything. I'm going as Columbine."

"My dear child," said John sympathetically, "you simply mustn't. Why Columbine doesn't wear enough to keep a girl warm on a summer's day."

"I'll go all the same," said Phyllis, declaring mutiny.

"Nothing's going to stop me. If you say anything to mother about it I shall hate you."

John didn't like to be hated by his patients. He was weak in that way.

"Well," he said, "we'll see what we can do in three days. Friday is a long way off. But you musn't risk an early death. You're much too pretty for that. What would Gosport's say, and Mr. Hobbs, the shopwalker?"

"Oh, he can go and drown himself as far as I'm concerned," said Phyllis, but she rewarded his compliment by blushing very charmingly and laughing under her brown eyelashes.

"Now, be good and don't disgrace me as a doctor," pleaded John. "I'm only starting in practice and I can't afford to be known as the man who kills his patients. It might get rumoured round Chelsea, and then where should I be?"

He chaffed her and got her talking again while he glanced round the room. She wasn't a very tidy young person. Her under-clothing was somewhat scattered—very dainty and diaphanous for a little shop girl. It must have cost a good deal of money, judging from the prices he had studied now and then in the shop windows. By her bedside on the wall was a little bookshelf with her favourite novels. *Beau Geste* . . . *The Blue Lagoon* . . . *The King's Highway* . . . *The Scarlet Pimpernel* . . . *Scaramouche*. She loved Romance, he observed, and he approved of her taste. It was better for her than Realism. Much healthier than those novels read by Cynthia Ide, in Cadogan Square, though not so high-brow.

"I'm terribly keen on dancing," she told him. "And I've never been to a fancy-dress dance in my life. Isn't that awful?"

"Neither have I," said John. "But then, I should have to go as Satan or something ugly."

It was then that he saw that photograph of Sir Francis Ide on the mantelpiece.

Hardly possible, he thought, looking at it from a distance, but that was certainly Cynthia's father smiling out of a cheap frame.

"Queer!" he remarked. "I know that man on the mantelpiece, unless I'm mistaken."

"It's a friend of mine," she said, after a slight pause.

Then she explained matters, quite simply, with a kind of excitement.

"As a matter of fact it's Sir Francis Ide. You know, the one who owns all the Picture Palaces. He's an awful old dear, and gives me presents sometimes. Oh, there's nothing wrong in it! He comes round to tea sometimes with mother and me. It's because he's lonely at home. Lady Ide is always playing bridge or going off with lounge-lizards. It must be awful for him. And he's as simple as anything. Talks to mother and makes her laugh. Sometimes he takes me out to dinner at the big restaurants. I was fearfully frightened at first, but I'm getting used to it now—all the forks they have and the men in evening-dress and all that. It's Sir Francis Ide who gave me the ticket for the fancy-dress ball."

"I see," said John. "Very friendly of him. How did you get to know him?"

Well, she made no secret about it. He had come into Gosport's a good many times and she had served him with some handkerchiefs. He didn't seem to mind what colour they were! Then one day he had asked her whether she liked the pictures and of course she did, so he gave her some tickets. After that he spoke to her one day in Sloane Street and was perfectly sweet to her. And the next time he asked her whether she would like to have a drive with him one day in his Rolls-Royce. She could bring her mother if she liked. Of course, her mother thought it wonderful and had asked him into tea after a drive to Hindhead and back and he had behaved just as if he were an old friend. That was the best of real gentlemen. They were so perfectly natural. No side or swank or anything like that.

"No," said John.

He wondered if it were all right. He had a feeling that it was all wrong. On the other hand there was no reason why Sir Francis Ide shouldn't be a good-natured man who liked to do a good turn to a pretty girl without any harm in it. He had gone round sometimes to take tea with her mother. It was the sort of thing John would do himself, not caring twopence about class distinctions. Still, Sir Francis Ide was not a man of good repute. Cynthia had hinted at golden-haired ladies and was afraid of heredity. And there

was a little journalist girl—Betty Truslove who had said something about scandals in the Ide cupboard.

“If I were you,” said John, “I’d be careful of Sir Francis Ide. I mean I wouldn’t be seen about with him too much or take his presents. It’s rather—well—dangerous, perhaps.”

“Oh, I know how to take care of myself,” said Phyllis quickly. Then she laughed and made a confession.

“Of course, he’s a bit of an old flirt! Well, why shouldn’t he be? It doesn’t mean anything, and I’m not as ugly as sin.”

“As long as you know how to take care of yourself,” said John.

These girls knew what life meant. They went wide-eyed about the world. They read the Sunday papers. It was no good pretending that they were little ignoramuses who had to be guarded against their own innocence. Anyhow, as a doctor he had to be discreet and keep a check on his tongue. He couldn’t go libelling Cynthia’s father. Perhaps there was nothing wrong in it either. This girl’s mother would know how to look after her.

“Tuck yourself up and take a couple of aspirins,” he advised. “Don’t forget that hot-water bottle, and don’t break your heart if I don’t let you go to that fancy-dress ball.”

“Oh, I’m going!”

And go she did, against his protests, as he knew on the morning afterwards when he saw her Columbine’s frock on the back of a bedroom chair. She had had a wonderful time and was none the worse for it. Sir Francis Ide had been perfectly sweet and had invited her into his box with some of his friends. All men friends who were very amusing. Well, of course, they were a little lively, and one of them had wanted to kiss her, but Sir Francis had told him off properly.

“It’s a wonder you haven’t developed pneumonia,” said John. “That frock is no warmer than a cobweb.”

It appeared that a press photographer had picked her out among all the others and taken several pictures of her for the morning papers. There she was in the *Daily Mirror*! Wasn’t it luck?

“I’m not so sure,” said John.

But he couldn’t help smiling at her excitement and joy.

XXXIII

DURING the absence of Eric Pardoe at Nice, that writing-man, Gilbert Blake, whom Janet called Smudge, took to coming round more often in the evenings, and John was glad to see him for his own sake as well as for Janet's.

He talked well when he happened to be in a mood for talking and had interesting ideas on art and life. On the whole they were pessimistic ideas which led to arguments with John who took a hopeful view of things, though sometimes perturbed. He seemed to be convinced that civilisation was rotten and that Europe was "doomed," though he didn't seem quite clear as to the exact form of doom.

It was mostly due to science, he thought. They had found out too much—or not enough. Too much because they were putting powers into the hands of mankind which would be used for destruction as the spiritual nature of man had not developed at the same pace as these mechanical toys. Of course, there would be another war! Under cover of all the peace talk all the nations were preparing for another struggle. Well, they wouldn't drag him in again! It would be in the air next time. They would make a nasty mess of London and other cities. The little flappers would get it in the neck and serve them damn well right, because they still glorified the fighting man, and physical courage and flag wagging.

Then the scientists, he thought, had found out too much—or not enough—about the mechanism of the mind and the functions of the body. All that muck about glands and internal secretions and vitamins and complexes and behaviourism. Their cheap little books had destroyed the simplicity and mystery of life, although, of course, they never got as far as spiritual realities which lay outside their range of thought.

The other day he had seen a girl in an omnibus—a little typist or something of the sort—reading the *Elements of Biology*. Could

anything be more frightful? Why didn't she read poetry or romance? It was this scientific materialism which was destroying civilisation. The old gods had been dethroned. Even love had lost its glamour. The modern young woman scoffed at the emotions and talked glibly about birth control or sex appeal, as though passion and devotion would be explained in a sixpenny textbook and put on the same level as the elements of hygiene or home notes for housewives!

It was this woman-business, said Smudge, which was preparing the doom of Europe. They were getting the leadership of life. They had become wage-earners instead of home-minders. They had declared their independence and hardened themselves. The whole scheme of social life was devoted to their self-conceit. The newspapers had become magazines for women. The shops displayed their underclothing. Millions of money was spent in advertising all the things they wanted for their bodies and their beauty and their damned greediness. Art was enslaved by them. The theatres were controlled by the box offices who were dependent on plays for women. Tallulah Bankhead tearing off her clothes. Owen Nares discussing sex with girls round the drawing-room fire. Women novelists flooded the market with indecent literature and attacks on marriage. Not that he thought much of modern marriage, but whose fault was it that it had become such a ghastly failure? They didn't play the game as they wanted to take everything and give nothing. They had no sense of loyalty and no respect for the men they had married. . . .

So he argued one night, getting hot about it until Janet laughed at him.

John listened with interest, and now and then with alarm. That prophecy of another war was distressing, but he didn't believe it. The peoples of Europe would not be caught in that trap again, unless they all went mad. The risks were far too great. Of course they *might* go mad, but the younger crowd seemed fairly sane.

As for women, he agreed with Janet that Smudge was libelling them. These modern girls were keen to know things. They were out for truth. That was better than an innocence based on ignorance which was far more dangerous. Of course, they couldn't find truth—who could?—but they were facing up to the facts of life frankly

and fearlessly. Those novels that were being read by girls like Cynthia Ide were rather risky, certainly, but they appealed to women because they gave some new interpretation of life, or revealed the secrets of the mind, or drew the curtains back from other people's lives. It was hopeless nowadays to say that woman's place is in the home. They would want to know which home. Where were the boys who could afford to marry them. There weren't enough to go round, anyhow. They weren't content with playing tennis with the local curate, or golf with elderly generals who had no more wars to win. So they found a job somewhere and took rooms in Chelsea or Bloomsbury with some girl friend who could poach an egg without spilling it on the hearthrug. As far as John was concerned he admired their spirit, in rain, fog, or sleet, in silk stockings or Russian boots. It was their day out, and something good would follow. They were Shakespeare's women in short frocks, so it seemed to him.

"Good for you, John!" cried Janet. "I like to hear such a noble defence. I believe in 'this freedom.' Smudge is a reactionary and a mediævalist."

"I believe in old-fashioned love," proclaimed Smudge.

"There's no such thing," said Janet. "There's just love, as it was yesterday and will be to-morrow."

"I wish I could find it," he answered gloomily.

He did not realise that he was giving himself away and that most of his conversation was self-revelation—the unveiling of a mind out of harmony with life, hostile to its activities, afraid of these young women who had more joy than himself, self-tortured because of a craving for some ideal love which had not come his way. John watched him with a professional eye, seeing that he had lapsed again with those infernal cigarettes. He noticed too that Smudge was quickly irritated by any opposition to his arguments except from Janet who seemed to calm him down and restore his good humour by her laughing comments and gift of sympathy. He was having the devil of a time with a new novel, he said. He had chucked the play after the second act. . . .

"Isn't Smudge a bit of a nuisance?" asked John one night when he came home late from his rounds. "To-night was the third time this week."

Janet hesitated for a moment before she answered.

"I'm afraid things are reaching a crisis," she said. "He tells me that he's having frightful scenes with Lucy. Tears and brain storms. He thinks she's unfaithful to him. She locks him out of her bedroom. Poor old Smudge! I'm desperately sorry for him."

"I'm rather sorry for Lucy," answered John. "It must be hell living with a literary man haunted by the creatures of his own fancy, and agonising over their imaginary troubles. Real life seems to worry some people, but when it's complicated by the fantasies of a dream world——"

Janet didn't seem to be sorry for Lucy. She said she ought to be whacked for her coldness to a sensitive plant like Smudge—one of the rare souls of the world—a poet really.

"Well," said John, "don't let him twine his sensitive tendrils round you, my dear. It might lead to trouble."

He spoke the words chaffingly and then regretted them when he saw that he had distressed her by that careless remark which was only half-serious.

"John, that's caddish! It's not like you. Smudge is the soul of honour. Fastidious!"

"Sorry," said John. "It's my vulgar mind."

He put his arm round her and rubbed his bristly chin against her cheek.

XXXIV

THERE were, as we have seen, a few little links, here and there, between the lives of some of these people whom Dr. Jevons visited as a general practitioner, getting busy—over-worked in time of influenza.

He was always astonished when they cropped up, suspecting the long arm of coincidence—that photograph of Sir Francis Ide, for instance—and yet it would have been strange if these individuals in the same district, heavily populated though it was, like a human bee-hive with innumerable cells (all those little flats and bed-sitting-rooms and narrow houses) had been utterly isolated. He was surprised again to find that Betty Truslove, that little journalist girl who had been at Janet's party on the night when he had been called to his first patient, should be engaged to Cyril Thistledown who lodged with Mrs. Dix in Royal Avenue, and knew Phyllis, who was Police Constable Widgery's wife's sister, and a very obstinate young person who disobeyed her doctor's orders. That seems rather complicated, but that's how life is when it weaves its thread of plot, never so straight and simple as the novelists make it because they hate, very wisely, to get things tangled.

How he came to find it out was because Betty kept him waiting in the dark one night when he called round to see how she was after a slight attack of ptomaine poisoning—more properly called paratyphoid, though that doesn't matter. She shared rooms in Church Street, Chelsea, with a girl friend named Joyce Winter, who had escaped from a very nice home in the country—her father was General Sir Erskine Winter—with ten acres of gardens (laid out by Miss Jekyll) and all modern conveniences, in order to earn two pounds a week with independence and the right to her own life. Part of that life consisted in having scrappy meals with Betty Truslove at a cheap little restaurant in Chelsea, and that was where

both of them were when Dr. Jevons called round to see his patient, though he didn't know it at the time.

It was a little old house in Church Street, Chelsea, and when John walked upstairs to the top floor—the staircase was dimly lit—he had a sense of its former inhabitants. They were snuffy old gentlemen in greasy wigs like Dr. Johnson, and perhaps a poet now and then starving in a top garret, and later in history, a pretty person with ringlets and sloping shoulders who read the works of young Mr. Dickens. Anyhow, thought John, nice people must have lived here. He felt it somehow. And nice people lived there now. When he knocked at Betty Truslove's door and could not get an answer, a little door opposite opened quickly and a girl with smooth black hair looped over her ears popped her head out and explained things pleasantly.

"Miss Truslove left the key with me, in case anyone called. She's having a meal at the Blue Cockatoo. She'll be back in a tick now."

"Abominable Betty!" exclaimed Dr. Jevons. "She ought to be in bed. I'll wait and bully her."

The girl with the black hair laughed.

"She had a story to do for her paper. The telephone bell kept ringing like mad. I'll let you in."

She let him in but there was no light in Betty's room.

"They must have forgotten to put a shilling in the slot," exclaimed the black-haired damsel. "And oh, Lor', I haven't got a shilling. To-morrow's my pay day, and anyhow I'm rather slack just now."

"A journalist like Betty?" asked John.

She laughed at the idea.

"No such luck. I'm an artist's model. Very uncertain these days. Most artists are starving to death, you know."

"Sorry to hear it," said John, stumbling over one of Betty's chairs.

With the aid of matches, and the help of the artist's model who giggled when the last match went out and left them in utter blackness, he succeeded in putting a shilling in the slot machine. And then it ought to have been a penny, because it wasn't a shilling in the slot machine after all, so that when Betty came in with Joyce

Winter, a quite respectable doctor was clutching on to an artist's model in the dark, having just fallen off the kitchen chair.

However, Betty wasn't scandalised, being used to that sort of thing, and having got the light on, she introduced Miss Joyce Winter—her stable-companion as she called her—and suggested making some cocoa, or tea if he preferred it.

"Neither, thanks," said John. "I'm just here to bully you."

She looked as though she were too tired to be bullied, and quite unwell.

"What do you mean by going out when you ought to be in bed?" asked John savagely. "Do I want the streets of Chelsea strewn with the corpses of charming young women? You're as bad as another patient of mine who went to a fancy dress-ball dressed as Columbine when she had a bad dose of influenza."

"Phyllis Dix," said Betty. "That pretty brat in Royal Avenue."

That was rather startling. One of those links!

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"Oh, easy!" cried Betty. "I'm engaged to Birdie Thistle-down who happens to be a sub-editor on my Rag, so that he squeezes in my stories. Bribery and corruption of which I take full advantage. . . . He lodges with Mrs. Dix, and Phyllis gives him the glad-eye. Besides, I saw her photo in the Rag. As pretty as a poppet."

Well, that was a warning not to mention one patient to another. He would have to be more careful in future. Not that it mattered in this case. And instead of bullying Betty Truslove, he made a grab at her just in time to save her from falling over the fender in a faint.

"Silly little ass!" cried Joyce Winter. "She *would* go out and do that story, just because the news editor was keen to get a scoop. Oh, Betty!"

"Nothing to worry about," said John reassuringly. "She'll be all right with her head down."

She was all right in a few minutes, after turning her head from side to side on the hearthrug and then being sick in the fender.

"Extremely sorry," she remarked after that episode. "Very ill-mannered of me!"

"That news editor ought to be arrested for cruelty to children," growled John. "Is he always as ruthless as that?"

Betty defended him.

"Oh, my fault entirely! I didn't want to let the Rag down and said I was perfectly fit. It doesn't do to feel unwell too often if one wants to keep one's job in Fleet Street."

She was still lying on the hearthrug when Mr. Birdie Thistledown arrived without a hat, probably to counteract a slight tendency to baldness creeping up his forehead. He was a very pleasant-looking young man with red hair and a whimsical mouth, and thoughtful eyes. Miss Joyce Winter had let him in and said, "Betty's ill."

Perhaps that information, or a natural disinclination to show emotion, accounted for a complete lack of surprise at seeing the girl to whom he was engaged lying on the floor in a dishevelled state. He looked as though it were the most natural thing in the world to be sick in the fender.

"That was a topping story of yours to-night," he said. "It's going on the front page to-morrow."

This news seemed to act as a wonderful tonic to Betty Truslove. A wave of colour rushed into her face and her eyes shone with a new brightness.

"How perfectly splendid!"

"The Chief is rather bucked about it," said Birdie Thistledown. "He sent down a chit marked 'Very good! . . . Front Page.'"

Betty Truslove sat up and laughed, and wiped her lips with a handkerchief provided by Joyce Winter.

"You're making it all up," she protested incredulously.

"No, honour bright!"

John helped the little lady to her bedroom, which was slightly larger than a bath-room, and departed when Joyce Winter was brewing some cocoa for Mr. Thistledown.

It was on his next visit when Betty was in bed and he had just room to sit on the chair by her side, but none to spare, that she began talking about Cynthia and Sir Francis Ide.

"Cynthia has a complex about marriage," she told him. "It's a marvel that she had got engaged to Basil Hyde. Personally I think she might have made a better choice."

"Anything against the young man?" asked John self-consciously. He remembered certain day-dreams which had lured him into something like unprofessional conduct—those meetings in Chelsea Gardens.

"Not reliable," said Betty. "Hopelessly rotten, I should say."

It appeared that she had known Basil Hyde up at Oxford before she was sent down from Somerville for unladylike conduct. He had belonged to the æsthetic crowd and had played about with a tea shop girl, poor little wretch. Last year, before he had begun to rave about Cynthia, he had gone about with some of the hussies at the Two-of-Hearts Club. A poisonous set, patronised by Sir Francis Ide among others.

"So you don't like Cynthia's father either?" remarked John cautiously.

"Well, I wouldn't be seen alone with him," said Betty laughing in a sinister way. "That was a pretty bad case of his with Mrs. Wilmersley. I had to do it for the Rag. . . . I'm sorry for Cynthia. She's priceless. A most perfect thing."

John agreed with her, but he didn't encourage further conversation on the subject with this little journalist girl who seemed to know all the scandalous history of the town, and talked about it with alarming frankness. She was hardly more than a child to look at, but human nature held few mysteries for her, though she kept merry and bright and seemed to think the world a peep-show for members of her profession. She rushed about reporting its latest stupidities with a devotion to her paper which was above hunger, or sickness, or weariness of mind and body. Hadn't he read a novel about that sort of thing once?

As he walked down Church Street, Chelsea, Dr. Jevons, who liked his patients, felt worried about Cynthia Ide and—strange that they should be linked together in his mind—a pretty little shop-girl called Phyllis Dix.

XXXV

ERIC PARDOE returned from Nice with a sun-flushed face—more like Adonis than before—some new suits (made out there), and a new manner to fit them. Something had happened to him, as Janet observed with her quick eyes and as John agreed. He was more cheerful, more alert, less moody. Success had happened to him, and the first breath of it—that wonderful tonic!—had released him from the dark cloud of pessimism which had overhung his mind. It had liberated him from the inferiority complex which had made him so cynical about life, so hostile to the world and so introspective.

He had made a hit, it seemed, with that small part into which he had to get a touch of passion. The Man with the Megaphone—Braithwaite—had bullied him, coached him, sworn at him, but had been pleased with the result. In fact, he was so extraordinarily pleased that he had fixed him up with a new contract for the principal part in a scenario based on a novel by the author of *Romantic Ladies* which was going to be a super-film. Thirty pounds a week.

“You didn’t say thirty, by any chance?” asked Janet faintly, as though about to swoon. “You meant to say three, no doubt.”

Eric laughed, knowing that she was shamming a little, but impressed all the same.

“Thirty I said. And he knew perfectly well he was robbing me. It ought to be sixty at least for a part like that. It’s a star part. The Owen Nares touch. I ought to get star prices. Still, I’ll wait a bit before I get greedy.”

He hadn’t waited a bit before he got extravagant. He brought gifts which were only heralds of a more princely largesse. For Janet he brought a Venetian shawl of black silk, marvellously embroidered with red roses, and with a yard-long fringe.

“It would be extremely good if you would wear it once or twice,” he suggested with a return to his old timidity for a moment.

"Of course, if you don't think it suits you, you can give it to the wench who sells flowers in Sloane Square."

"I think it suits me wonderfully," said Janet, "only I shall feel like Carmen in it. Dark and dangerous."

She put it on then and there, blushing when Eric tightened it round her hips in the Venetian style and then stood back to study the effect.

"I say!" he exclaimed in an awed sort of way. "It's miraculous!"

Certainly she looked very good in it, with those dark eyes and that grace which was her gift.

"I shall only dare to wear it on great occasions," she warned him shyly. "It's no good for the Blue Cockatoo. Much too grand."

"We'll do a dinner at the Carlton," said Eric, as though he commanded the wealth of the Indies.

He was more embarrassed when he produced his gift for John.

"Couldn't think what on earth to bring you, sir."

He had brought him a very handsome cigarette case of real tortoiseshell, too handsome for a general practitioner who dressed shabbily.

"That's magnificent!" cried John, much impressed. "It's too good for the likes of me, and honestly why should you give me anything?"

"Well, of course!" said Eric, with another return to his older manner, "if you don't care for it—or if you think it's cheek of me to bring it——"

"My dear lad," said John hurriedly, "I like it immensely. I'm only afraid of appearing too prosperous to some of my patients. They may delay with their fees if I flash this in their eyes!"

"It burns pretty rapidly in a good fire," suggested Eric in a casual way, as though hurt by this reception of his gift. He was still quick to believe himself slighted; not yet cured of that dark moodiness.

Not completely, but it was only now and then that he relapsed. He had lost that slight stutter of his; his eyes shone with a more steady light; he laughed more easily; he was less self-conscious. Strange what success can do as a moral stimulant!

John studied him with new interest. Probably all his life since childhood this boy had believed himself a failure. He had been bad at games and so had hated them. He had been delicate and the bigger boys had bullied him and kicked his shins. He had been jeered at as a "mammy's boy." His father had thought him a weakling. Later he had been jilted by a girl who preferred the gentleman at Tufnell Park. He had tramped about to film studios, unable to get a job. He had got it into his head that life had a "downer" on him. Now he was on the road to fame and fortune. He was worth thirty pounds a week—and more than that if he liked to insist. It had toned up his whole system. His skin was a better colour. His lips were not so bloodless. He ran upstairs instead of crawling upstairs. Hope and good luck had had physical effects. It was the influence of mind on the body again—beyond calculation!

XXXVI

DOCTOR JEVONS was leading a double life—that home life of his in Walpole Street with Janet as his good comrade, unobtrusively sparing him from household worries, and that other professional life beyond the front door, tending rather to squeeze out the former as his practice kept growing. There was, of course, a treble life which sometimes asserted itself at odd moments, but otherwise retired to its own hiding-place. And that was the life of his mind below stairs, so to speak, below the level of his critical brain, but always busy recording impressions, storing up odd scraps of knowledge, crowded with secret impulses, desires, instincts, inherited tendencies and fantasies which only came up to consciousness when his intellectual controls were weakened by fatigue or sleep.

He was getting to know his London rather well, even beyond the tributaries of the King's Road. He was called to strange cases sometimes, and even the ordinary cases were deeply interesting to him because each one of them added to his experience of the way in which people's minds adjusted themselves—or failed to adjust themselves—to the stresses and strains of this turbulent city. That was his line of country. He wanted to get the Open Sesame to that secret city, more closely guarded than the front doors of London. If he could get the keys to that he would have greater adventures than Haroun al Raschid. He would be able to help people to fight against their own demons and to laugh at their own fears, and quite often to cure their self-inflicted maladies.

Now and again he came in touch with the oddest abnormalities—border-line cases. They were mostly women with strange neuroses, unable to walk, afflicted with imaginary diseases, distressed by vague and frightful fears. Several times he had helped them a good deal by probing back to their early life and finding some childish obsession—often it was caused by the stupidity of parents

or nurses, or by some childish fantasy—so ridiculous that when once brought up to consciousness, the mind rejected it as an absurdity and the trouble disappeared. Many times he found ill-balanced minds, unable to face the responsibilities of life, because of the stupidity of parents which had prevented the normal development of their children's character by over-indulgence or emotional demands upon their love, or psychological cruelty of some kind. Even parental love could be deadly to young minds—the greedy love of the mother for her only son, the jealous love of a father for his only daughter, disturbing the fine balance of natural instincts by which adolescence attains strength to lead its own life and find its own mate.

Occasionally he had glimpses of dark recesses of the mind beyond the exploration of psychologists, beyond explanation, unless one believed in supernormal faculties or, as old Aristotle had hinted—two thousand years ago, wasn't it?—some pool of consciousness of which the individual mind was but a water-drop, and in which was all intelligence and all knowledge and all truth. Perhaps the unconscious mind was like that, a deep well leading to the inexhaustible fountain spring.

There was one case which startled him and made him think so furiously down the King's Road that he passed Janet without seeing her until she grabbed his arm.

He had been to see a lady who was in a highly nervous condition because she refused to accompany her husband to France where he had the chance of a good position. Nothing would induce her to go, just as she had always refused to go to the Riviera or to Switzerland. It was the Channel crossing that she was afraid of. Of course, her husband had bullied her for such foolishness. And then he was frightened because of a sudden wild storm of hysteria. For hours on several succeeding days the doctor had tried to get back to the cause of that fear. It was a fear of water. She was afraid even of going in a boat on the Serpentine! Then he had put her into a slightly hypnotic state. The merest suggestion had sent her off like that. It was his chance to get at her subconscious memories.

"What were you doing on June the first of 1906?" he asked, taking her back to her girlhood.

It was her birthday, she told him. She was sitting up in the

breakfast-room—she knew it was the breakfast-room because of the pattern on the wall-paper with roses on a trellis—and she reached over for the jam pot—strawberry jam—just as Daddy came in. . . . Hullo, daddy! . . . And there was her mother in a summer frock with long sleeves. . . .

She seemed to see the whole scene again in perfect detail and sharpness, as though she saw it through a stereoscopic lens.

“What were you doing on June the first 1900?” asked John, going back to her childhood when she was two years old.

She was sitting up in her perambulator in Kensington Gardens. She was playing with a black-faced doll—Mr. Golliwog!—with button eyes. She could see the underneath part of the leaves, pale green and shining, belonging to a big tree with crinkly bark. There was a brown caterpillar crawling up the bark, dressed in fur like the thing mother wore round her neck. Alice—that was the nurse-maid—was talking to a man in a red jacket. . . .

“What were you doing on June the first 1899?” asked John with a sense of excitement, because of this exploration into the subconscious mind which had recorded everything and forgotten nothing. He wasn’t worrying just then about the cause of that fear of water. He had put that problem on one side. This was an experiment in the miracle of memory. How much farther could he take her back!

She was lying in her mother’s arms. Her mother was wearing a dress which had little balls on it—soft little bits of wool which she could clutch with her fingers. It was very warm in her mother’s arms. Oh, so warm! Her legs were wrapped up in a long bit of flannel. She wanted to kick them free. She kept kicking and then screamed, while her mother said “Hush, hush!” and held her tighter. She kept screaming in a funny little wailing voice. . . . She screamed again, like a baby in distress. . . .

Dr. Jevons watched her intently. She was lying back in a low chair, clutching something imaginary—those little balls of wool on her mother’s gown, perhaps.

“What were you doing on June the first 1898?” he asked quietly, and then held his breath to hear her answer.

It was the morning of her first birthday.

She was lying in a big room. Her mother—she was almost

certain it was mother—was in bed, but a long way off. There was a woman in a dress that made a noise when she moved, and there was a man in the room walking about. She was wrapped up in something, and someone had put her on one side so that she felt lonely. She was put on one side as though she had been forgotten. She wanted to cry out, but she could only make a little squeaky noise like a kitten. . . . She made a little squeaky noise again, not like a kitten, but like a new born babe. . . .

There were prenatal memories. There was even, perhaps, a race memory so that every human mind contains the ghosts of its ancestral life far back in history, when our forefathers hunted wild beasts, and hid themselves in caves, and were afraid of the darkness of night, and fled from noises in the jungle, and worshipped the demons of their fears, still haunting childhood in its dreams, and men and women who go to city offices, and drunkards in their delirium, and nice girls sheltered from all brutalities. This city of London in which Doctor Jevons walked on his rounds, with its many mansions, and streets of shops, and pride of wealth, and continual progress towards new phases of civilisation, was built on the ruins of ancient dwelling places, below which were the roots and rivers of the old jungle where mammoths roamed. Now and then when a new block of flats is being built, men dig up the bones of those beasts and relics of the savage tribes who hunted them. And so it is with the civilised mind, built also above the ruins and rubbish heaps of man's primæval ignorance. Now and then those savage thoughts, the bestial impulses of the jungle-dwellers, the passion and blood-lust of the cave-men, break through the overlay of modern civilisation which has built fine mansions of the mind, nicely furnished. . . .

"It's all very interesting," thought Dr. Jevons, walking down the King's Road, Chelsea, with those ideas in his head. "One day, perhaps, we shall be able to let more light into the underworld of the mind, and clear up the jungle."

Meanwhile he had promised to go with Janet to see the trade show of "*The Passions of Pamela*," in which Eric Pardoe had played the part of importunate lover.

XXXVII

ERIC entertained them in princely style before that private show of "The Passions of Pamela." He had insisted upon dining at the Carlton, to give Janet a chance of wearing that Venetian shawl, and in order to make a foursome he had invited Nina Ziborova, because she was rather decorative, he thought, and would be someone chatty for the doctor.

John was anxious about his patients—one or two of them were in a bad way and there was always the chance of a sudden call—but he left instructions with Mrs. Meggs—that hard-breathing woman in the basement—to ring him up in case of an urgent summons. Then he took the revellers in his Morris-Oxford, which he parked in St. James's Square after unloading them at the Carlton.

It was an amusing scene in the square on a glamorous evening in June, and characteristic of the new mode of the world of fashion, 1926. All round the railings of the gardens were cars of every size and shape, some of them guarded by smart chauffeurs smoking cigarettes, some of them arriving with owner-drivers who were mostly elegant young women in evening frocks, who revealed their pretty legs with a delightful lack of reticence as they wriggled out of ridiculously small vehicles splashed with the mud of many roads. They had come up, he guessed, from Surrey houses to do a dinner-and-show in town. Somewhere in the small hours of the morning they would chase back again, beyond the speed limit, behind gleaming lights which would dazzle the eyes of bunny rabbits in quiet lanes. A doctor in Walpole Street had seen them scorching down the King's Road when Police Constable Widgery was flashing his bull's-eye on to the locks and bolts of London by night.

Men in evening-dress without overcoats—members of the R.A.C., by the look of them—edged perilous cars with racing lines into vacant places and strolled off with their ladies for an even-

ing which would end, inevitably, in the dim and irreligious light of some ghastly night club where they would be very, very bored.

John gave a glance round the square, with its old Georgian houses—once the town mansions of the old nobility—and in his queer way for a moment he saw it crowded with the ghosts of history. They were little ladies in white wigs and puffed petticoats, stepping daintily from sedan chairs, and insolent footmen in the liveries of the great families, and link boys extinguishing their torches in those iron snuffers which still hung outside the railings. Then he was called back in 1926 by a voice which greeted him with friendly surprise.

“Hullo, Doctor! What are you doing here?”

It was Cynthia Ide, just unpacked from a very smart car driven by Basil Hyde. She stood there with a white cloak round her shoulders, looking charming as usual, so tall and slim and fine, with her fair hair cut like a boy's. But not well, thought the doctor, with a professional eye. There were tired little lines about her face, as though she had been sleeping badly again.

“Basil and I are dining at Prince's,” she explained. “After that we do a show at the Lyric. And after that a dance with some of Basil's poisonous crowd. So we keep it up! The Merry-go-Round!”

She laughed, but not quite happily, thought John.

“Going the pace,” he remarked.

“My poisonous crowd would be hurt if they heard you,” said Basil calmly, after putting a rug over the bonnet of his car. Then he smiled at the doctor and offered him a cigarette from a gold case that looked rather costly.

“Cynthia has a gift for truth-telling. Quite alarming sometimes.”

He nodded and turned to Cynthia.

“You ought to have let me deposit you at Prince's, dear lady. Now you will have to walk.”

“Fifty yards and a breath of fresh air,” said Cynthia.

She seemed interested for a moment in a Rolls-Royce that swung into the square and then slowed down to find a place.

“The family omnibus,” she remarked. “I wonder what father's up to.”

There was no one in the car except Henry Wilkins, the chauffeur whom John had treated as a patient one day.

Cynthia held her hand out to Janet.

"Love to Janet. If I can escape from Basil one night for once, I shall make a dash for Walpole Street. Before I get married and done for."

"Splendid!" said John. "When is the wedding?"

She put up four fingers to represent the weeks.

"No escape," she said in a low voice. "Except in dreams."

She laughed again, but John thought there was a kind of appeal in her eyes, a kind of silent cry for help—unless he imagined it. He watched her go with that man who was going to be her husband, that elegant young man upon whom Betty Truslove, the little journalist, had not reported favourably.

"I wonder!" he said thoughtfully, before hurrying off to the Carlton where the others were waiting for him.

It was quite pleasant, of course, dining at the Carlton, but as far as John Jevons was concerned it would have been just as good to dine at home with some toasted cheese (Mrs. Meggs did it very well) and a baked potato and a braised onion. It would have cost young Eric less, but he seemed to like flinging his money about, and was careful in his choice of wine.

Nina thought the whole thing splendid as an escape from the hat shop. She was a lady who liked to walk under cut-glass chandeliers, on carpets that were soft to her feet and between innumerable mirrors. She had done so as a girl in the palace of the Kremlin, where her mother was lady-in-waiting to the Empress, and where once she had been kissed by the Emperor. That was her dream-life, and the Carlton brought it back to her pleasantly. She flirted very merrily with John and laughed when he said, "None of your primitive impulses here, you know!" and she drank too much of Eric's carefully chosen wine, so that before dinner was over she was a little flushed and excited, and attracted the smiling attention of some of the other guests.

"My dear Doctor," she said, touching his hand across the tablecloth, "this is one of those hours in life which repay one—is it not?—for the oh so wearisome weeks of infinite unhappiness. Here is one of those charming sanctuaries of civilisation which

are so beautiful in contrast to life's brutality. For the moment I find it impossible to believe that I was once hunting vermin in my chemise when the Bolsheviks——"

"My dear Nina!" cried Janet, overhearing this reminiscence.

"But it is the truth that I tell," said Nina surprised by the laughing consternation in Janet's eyes.

Eric, belonging to the younger crowd, was not so shocked by this little Russian lady's frankness of speech. It reminded him of a contrast in his own life.

"Not so long ago," he remembered, "I was pawning my cuff-links at the corner of Walpole Street, and going to sleep in a bed-sitting-room because I couldn't afford a meal."

He had forgotten that it was John who had rescued him from that bed-sitting-room, at a critical moment.

"Life is rather like a movie, isn't it?" suggested John. "And this is the scene that goes best in the picture palaces. 'The Passions of Pamela,' with soft music and shaded lights, and Adonis in a white tie and a waistcoat with enamel buttons."

"Any objection to a waistcoat with enamel buttons?" asked Eric, raising his eyebrows with a faint smile.

"Good lord, no! It goes with the picture."

John did not wish to spoil sport. Janet looked as though she were enjoying herself. The people here were a well-mannered crowd. Nothing much wrong with them. No gilded vice or anything like that—apparently. But just for a moment it seemed to him hardly fair that he should be sitting here, helping to spend a lot of money on a meal that he didn't want, when other people he knew in basement rooms down Smith Street were so miserably poor, without a chance of escape from squalor. Then, too, his mind had gone back to the war, which was now forgotten, and sometimes when that happened he had a sense of guilt because he was alive at all—with such wonderful luck—keen on his career, getting a busy practice, exploring life with ceaseless interest. Something like a million boys had gone under—lots of them more brilliant than he would ever be, more valuable in the scheme of things. It didn't seem fair. . . . It was Eric who reminded him of the war. He was just like one of those second-lieutenants he had known—hit in the stomach by a shell. Perhaps that was why

Janet had such haunted eyes when she looked at this good-looking boy across the table. He took her back to war days. She saw in him the ghosts of those other boys. For their sake she was mothering him a little.

"Here's to our rising film star!" she said, touching her glass with her lips.

He raised his glass and smiled across his wine.

"Here's to the Lady with the Lamp!"

Perhaps there was some hidden meaning in that which the doctor missed, or it may have been just a tribute to Janet's care of him as a good nurse when he lay sick of the 'flu. But John did not pay much attention to this exchange of courtesies. He was watching two people who had just entered the room, bowed forward by the head-waiter who had found a corner table for them. One was that florid, good-looking man, Sir Francis Ide. The other was a pretty girl in a blue frock, with bare arms and long legs, looking just a little shy as she crossed the floor and threaded her way through the tables. It was Miss Phyllis Dix of Royal Avenue, sister-in-law of Police Constable Widgery.

Nina Ziborova was saying something about the mask behind which the Englishman hid his real character. Sometimes she wondered if there were anything there, or just a blank. Of course—occasionally. . . .

John did not follow her chain of thought. He was giving his attention to those new guests. That little shop-girl was perfectly self-possessed as she sat beside Sir Francis Ide and studied the menu card. She looked up and laughed as Sir Francis said something to her, putting his finger down his collar as though it were too tight for him. He looked like a benevolent uncle entertaining his niece in the holidays. . . . Well, these young things knew how to take care of themselves. So they said.

"Dreaming, Jacko?" asked Janet presently.

"He doesn't listen to one little word I speak," complained Nina. "But I go on talking to amuse myself. And I am very much amused!"

"I think we had better be moving to that place of ill-fame," suggested Eric Pardoe.

He called up the waiter and paid his bill with a magnificent

gift to the waiter. Too magnificent, as far as John was concerned, because Eric had no small change to pay for the taxi to the theatre and it was John who paid.

Tickets were by invitation. It wasn't a public show, exactly, Eric explained. It was to let the renters have a look at the thing before booking it for the picture palaces. Those red-lipped ladies were film-actresses and the wives of producers and the sisters-in-law of the camera men. Some of the Pomposities had been invited, and their names would be in the papers to-morrow. There was Lady Sussex looking like Dante, and there was that hideous and foul woman Margarita Magdalena. Not being a Society journalist, Eric explained, he couldn't provide labels for the rest of this odd-looking company, but they were probably the usual bunch who were glad to escape from their homes and get a free show anywhere.

"Cynic!" said Janet reprovingly.

"Realist," he answered.

"The Passions of Pamela" was preceded by slow music, topical pictures, mannequin parades of ladies in underclothing, and other light items. Sitting there in the darkness, John wondered what secret of psychology lay behind this invisible crowd—this immense silent audience. Perhaps Eric had got the heart of it—"to escape from their homes!" Rather to escape from themselves—the possibility of having to think during the leisure of a quiet evening, to sit alone with husband or wife, the risk of having to face the intolerable ordeal of introspection or self-consciousness. This was the house of forgetfulness. This darkness and these moving pictures on the screen, were like opium to fretted nerves and jaded senses and maladjusted minds. There was no need of concentration. The pictures changed every second before boredom had a chance. It was a dream-world, out of touch with reality, shutting out life with its responsibilities and worries, and squalor, and effort. This audience was pleasantly hypnotised, entirely liberated from the necessity and fatigue of thought.

"The Passions of Pamela" was not unamusing. That little fluffy-haired lady—a famous film-star, it seemed, judging from the applause which greeted her appearance on the screen—indulged in a number of amorous adventures, carefully toned down to pass the Censor—that genial old moralist!—but revealing her in

gorgeous bedrooms, better than Cynthia's, in various stages of undress, in pyjamas and in bathing kit. A well-shaped young woman, thought John, but no better than any of those girls who came pouring down the King's Road between nine and ten of a morning. When was that lad Eric going to appear? Not a sign of him yet. . . . Until suddenly he appeared in a scene on the Riviera, in the gardens of a Casino.

Nina clapped her hands, until Janet nudged her and whispered "Hush!"

He looked almost too beautiful to be true, and there was a freshness and boyishness in his way of acting which seemed to please others in the audience besides Nina.

"What a wonderful young man!" whispered a voice in the darkness next to John.

"Isn't he adorable!"

A girl with a torch-light was murmuring something along the row of seats.

"What's that?" asked a sharp voice irritated at this interruption.

"Is Dr. Jevons in this row?"

"Yes," said John.

"You're wanted."

"Oh dear!" said Janet. "What a pity!"

"Sorry," said John, groping for his hat.

Nina Ziborova pressed his hand.

"Noble man!" she whispered. "What a life of sacrifice! And all to keep people alive who would be happier dead, poor dears."

The little torch flickered on him, showed him the way to the stairs, led him out of the darkness with its pointing finger of light. There was a telephone message at the box office from Mrs. Meggs. . . . The lady in Ormonde Gate was taken bad.

XXXVIII

JOHN was home fairly late that night. The lady in Ormonde Gate had escaped from a life which she had found very difficult, and he had failed in his efforts to hold her back. Then there had been some trouble with a young husband, conscience-stricken because of a carelessness which had weakened his wife's will to live. He had broken down in an agony of remorse by the bedside of that dead lady, and John had stayed with him, pitiful.

He was surprised to find Janet still up, in his study, instead of leaving his cocoa on the trivet, as she did now as a rule.

"Wakeful to-night?" asked John.

"I thought I would wait up for you," she answered.

"How's Adonis after his triumph?"

Master Eric had gone to bed, it appeared. She had slipped down again after his door was safely shut. He hated going to bed.

"Still more reluctant to get up," remarked John, pouring out that cocoa into the cup which Janet had put for him on a side table. He lit a cigarette, which he wanted rather badly, and made some comments about the film show. Preposterous nonsense, he thought, but Eric had made an attractive figure as far as he had seen him. There was quite a thrill in the audience when he first appeared on the screen. It was the spirit of youth, fresh and vital and passionate which had stirred all those lonely women in the darkness. Even the men saw in him the symbol of their own youthfulness, as once they had pictured themselves. Good looking as a Greek god, irresistible to lovely girlhood!

"The movies," said John, "are the mirrors of our own day-dreams."

That hot cocoa was comforting in the small hours of the morning, and that dinner at the Carlton seemed a vague and distant memory. . . .

"John," said Janet suddenly. "I'm getting worried about Eric. He was very—silly—to-night."

She was smiling with those luminous eyes of hers behind a flutter of lashes. But when John looked up from his cocoa at her, he saw that there was a shining wetness in her eyes, as once before he remembered, in this room, over the cocoa.

"Silly? . . . Well, isn't that the privilege of youth? . . . In what way, old girl?"

He spoke lightly, but secretly was a little disturbed. Eric was one of those uncertain fellows that you could never be quite sure about. Not much self-control. Moody and quick to fly off the handle. Hysterical.

"John," said Janet with a queer kind of laugh as though it might change to tears, "he thinks he has fallen in love with me. I don't know what to do about it. It isn't my fault."

"Lord!" said John thoughtfully.

He did not jeer at her, as perhaps she was afraid he might. Most brothers might have guffawed heartily at this confession, and made a few jokes about it. But John had too much sympathy, and saw his sister's distress and emotion. Besides, that boy Eric was the sort of lad to go off the deep end if he fell in love with a woman who had just been kind to him and meant nothing more than that, like Janet.

Janet hinted at some scene that had taken place after the film show. They had taken Nina home and then sat over the fire here in John's study, talking about—well—life and so on. And then Eric had become romantic.

Janet laughed again at this romanticism, but nervously.

"Amorous?" asked John.

"Passionate!" she said.

John permitted himself a smile, though he didn't want to hurt his sister's feelings.

"It was probably the effect of that red wine at the Carlton, and the still more heady wine of fame and fortune. You shouldn't have worn the Venetian shawl. It's desperately alluring, my dear!"

The Venetian shawl lay over the back of his arm-chair, with its long fringe trailing, and Janet was now in her black frock, with bare

arms and shoulders, revealing that physical grace which John missed in some of the younger girls about.

"He thinks he's quite serious about it," said Janet. "He wants me to marry him—before he gets too busy with that next production. Of course, it's all nonsense. It's only an idea he's got into his head. He thinks I'm the Perfect Woman."

John was inclined to agree with him.

"I dare say he's not far wrong, Jenny, speaking as a friend and a brother."

"Oh, rubbish!" said Janet, blushing very deeply at this tribute.

"Of course, it's hard on the boy. It's always a bit tragic to play a lone hand in the game of love. However, I daresay he'll get over it all right."

Janet listened to this diagnosis with her elusive smile. He had got it all wrong, this analytical brother. She was silent for a few moments, and then startled him by her next words, spoken quietly.

"He's not playing a lone hand, Jacko. And that's where the tragedy comes in, perhaps. You see I happen to love the boy, and that makes it very awkward for me."

She told him that quite calmly, as though it were amusing, and a little absurd, but suddenly this affectation of amusement, this mask of indifference, fell from her, and she began to cry, quietly at first, and then with a passion of tears.

"My dear old girl!" said John nervously and exceedingly distressed. "My poor dear Jenny!"

He got up from his chair and went over to her and put his arms round her and his face against her cheek.

"I hadn't the faintest idea," he said. "Not the faintest."

"Sorry," said Janet, wiping her eyes. "I don't often make a fool of myself, like this, I mean. I've been beastly weak from the beginning. It was so nice to be loved again. It seemed to put the clock back—these years since the war. I'm not such an old hag after all. I mean I feel young and I haven't got over the need of love and all that."

"Good heavens, no!" said John. "What on earth are you talking about? Old hag, indeed! Why the best age of a woman is forty-five, and you're years away from that."

She laughed through her tears, after a moment, and then wept

again. She wept so bitterly that her brother was frightened. He had never seen Janet give way to weakness like this. He had never suspected her of such suppressed emotion, breaking its bounds now for the first time. This quiet Janet with her common sense, her satire, her dislike of self-revelation, must have kept a lot of spiritual agony behind that locked door of her secret cupboard. Now it had burst out, breaking the locks and bars of self-control, just for a few moments and no more than that.

"He reminds me of Jingo," she said presently, when that storm was over. "It's as though Jingo had come back again."

For the life of him John could not think whom she meant by Jingo, until suddenly some old memory reasserted itself and he knew it was that boy Jack Lavington who had been very keen on her before the war.

"The absurdity of it is," she said, "that Eric pretends that it doesn't matter at all, our difference in age. He gets angry when I say that it would be like marrying his mother. And all the time I know that it's just because I mothered him that he became sentimental about me. He never has been mothered—he was just sent away to school like a Wee Willie Winkie, and now he comes to me for something that he always craved for. It's nothing to do with love in the ordinary way. As Jingo loved me, for my own sake."

John was startled by this study in psychology. It was probably true. That boy Eric had the mother-complex. It was part of his bitterness against life, perhaps the chief cause of it, that he had never known a real home, never been tucked up in bed, petted by the woman who had brought him into the world. When he was a small schoolboy she had been flirting with subalterns in India. Perhaps Janet fulfilled his ideal of the dream mother who had come to him in the long dormitory of that public school which he had hated so much and from which he escaped only at bedtime, in the darkness, when those who bullied him were snoring.

"How can you be sure of it?" asked John. "You're rather beautiful, Janet. What makes you think he isn't in love with you in the ordinary way, as you call it?"

"I know that he thinks I'm a middle-aged woman," said Janet quietly. "He flinches when I tell him that I'm ten years older."

It seems enormous to him . . . and that's why he gets angry when I remind him. He wants to forget it. He pretends that it doesn't matter, but I know that it hurts him."

She put her hand on her brother's arm and spoke with a new intensity of emotion that had no weakness in it now.

"John, supposing I yielded to this temptation and let him marry me in a sentimental mood. How should I feel—and what humiliation to him—when one day a few years from now perhaps, he turned away from a middle-aged wife to see a young thing like himself, the other half of him, and knew that only loyalty could keep him to the woman who had mothered him. How frightful for both of us!"

John paced up and down his study. It was a pretty difficult problem. He wanted to be fair to the boy and kind to Janet, and in any case to see this affair straight in a clear light, without a touch of prejudice or exaggeration.

"If you two people love one another," he said presently, after a long silence, "it might be the best thing in the world to make a match of it. It sounds big, that difference in age, but it won't seem so different when you both get older. Thirty-two looks old to twenty-two. I admit that. But thirty-three draws closer to forty-three. It's quite possible that Eric needs a woman older than himself. It might be the making of him. It might——"

"Jacko!" cried Janet. "For pity's sake don't play the tempter. I'm weak enough as it is. I need all the strength I have——"

"I don't see anything against it," said John with sudden obstinacy. "On my word of honour, I don't. I think that boy will be damn' lucky if he gets you. I'm all for it."

He saw Janet's face go white as she turned from him, and went over to the mantelpiece and leaned her head against it with a queer little sob in her throat.

"No!" she said. "No! I should be a cheat. I should be a—slut. He's just in a romantic mood. He's a baby . . . and I'm a grown woman—with a dead boy in my heart."

John stood there silently, staggered by these words. That secret cupboard in her soul was wide open now. He felt abashed by her spiritual agony. He was stirred with a rush of pity for this friend and sister.

She turned away from the mantelpiece and came over to him with a smile on her white face.

"Hysteries!" she said. "Rotten bad form for the sister of Dr. Jevons! . . . Good night, my dear."

He kissed her on the cheek and saw her go out of the room with her head up, and listened while she went upstairs and shut her bedroom door softly.

"So we hide from each other," he said to himself. "Each in his hidden city. . . . I wonder if that cocoa's cold?"

XXXIX

JOHN had a glimpse of Cynthia once or twice before the date of that wedding at St. Margaret's, Westminster. She was too busy, it seemed, to come round to Walpole Street, owing to the exigencies of Press photographers, modistes and all the other servants of luxury who wait upon a young lady before she trails a white train to the altar and disappears for a time from the social news. But he saw her one evening when Lady Ide needed medical attention. It was Cynthia who telephoned an urgent message.

"Mother is horribly unwell, Doctor. Do come round quickly. It's something to do with a pearl necklace."

She rang off before John could express his astonishment at this new form of disease. Perhaps Lady Ide had swallowed the pearls—or believed she had done so, like Lady Liveredge and her false tooth.

But the fact was that the necklace had been stolen, and this theft had upset Cynthia's mother and seriously annoyed Sir Francis Ide, who had rung up the police. They were in the house when John arrived—two plain-clothes men who were interrogating the servants in Sir Francis Ide's study and seemed suspicious of the second footman—that young fellow who had been so haughty about John's hat and gloves.

John was shown into the study, where Sir Francis stood with his back to the fire with a heavy frown on his florid face.

"I can't understand it," he said to one of the detectives as John entered. "Her ladyship wore it last night and didn't go out after dinner. I don't accuse any of the servants—I don't accuse anyone—but it's got to be found."

The detective desired to ask the young man a few more questions.

"Well, I'll leave you to it," said Sir Francis Ide.

He nodded to John and held out a hand.

"Glad you've come. My wife has had a bit of a shock. . . .

You'll find me in the card-room when you come down. My daughter Cynthia is with her mother."

He stood for a moment at the open door of a room leading out of the hall, and John had a momentary glimpse of three men seated at a card-table, smoking. One of them was Basil Hyde who leaned back in his chair in a bored way, watching a ring of cigar smoke above his head.

The maid who had let John into the hall said, "This way, Doctor," and led him upstairs to Lady Ide's room. A door opened at the end of the landing and John saw Cynthia standing there in a white frock which might have been her wedding-dress in some embryo stage of milinery. Behind her in the room were two or three young women busy with diaphanous garments.

"Sorry, Doctor," said Cynthia, taking John's hand and holding it for a moment. "Mother seems much better now."

"Quick work!" remarked John.

Cynthia smiled and agreed.

"Mother is like that. Dramatic effects! Still I'm rather scared about her. May I speak to you when you've seen her?"

"I'd like it," said John. "Where shall I find you?"

She would be alone there in a few minutes. They were putting the finishing touches to her ridiculous wedding outfit. The sacrificial draperies of a Vestal Virgin, she said.

"I dare say you will look very nice in them," said John cheerfully, though he was ashamed of some sense of regret—some shadowing thought—which passed through his mind. Surely he had got the better of that nonsense which had taken hold of him for a time with regard to this girl?

She put her hand on his arm and led him into her mother's room.

"Feeling better, mother darling?" she asked. "Here is Dr. Jevons."

Then she slipped away again, closing the door behind her.

Lady Ide did not look quite so young as when John had last seen her—on the night of the dance here. The faint little lines which he had seen about her eyes and mouth had deepened and darkened. She was worrying about something, he thought. For a moment he saw something—a startled look—like fear in her

eyes as she turned quickly away from her dressing-table when Cynthia led him in. But then, instantly, she recovered herself and put on that air of roguishness which had made her fame as Dulcie Devereux.

"How absurd of them to send for you, Doctor! Just a little faintness because the room was too hot. Now, don't tell me I look like a haggard old woman. It's the light!"

She held his hand and looked into his eyes with her head slightly on one side, alluringly.

"I'm afraid you've had rather a shock," said John sympathetically. "That pearl necklace——"

"Oh, drat the pearl necklace!" she cried with a sudden petulance. "Francis makes such a fuss about those silly old pearls. I must have dropped them in the street, or left them in the club lavatory. Anywhere!"

"Well, as long as you don't mind," said John good-naturedly. "How's the pulse, I wonder? . . . And I'd just like to listen to your heart for a moment."

"For goodness' sake don't listen to all its naughty tales," said Lady Ide. "It has led me into a lot of trouble, the wicked little villain!"

Nothing much the matter, perhaps, with the heart. But something a little wrong with the pulse. It had a slow beat for a lady of such vivacity. Also there was a touch of temperature. Lady Ide was feverish.

"I'm afraid you've been worrying," said John presently. He was also afraid that she had been drugging herself somehow, but he didn't say so.

"Good heavens, yes!" exclaimed Lady Ide with theatrical intensity. "How can one live these days without worrying? Those nagging little bridge debts—the telephone—that woman who *will* keep one waiting at the hairdresser's—and all the fuss of Cynthia's wedding. Worry? My dear good man, of course, of course!"

"Nothing more than that?" asked John, searching her face with his good-humoured eyes.

She flushed for a moment painfully, and avoided that searching gaze.

"What are you trying to get at?" she asked with sudden irritability.

John laughed at this challenge of his methods of diagnosis.

"The cause of the trouble," he told her. "The reason why you've been doping yourself with some nasty little drug, which makes one forget the things one doesn't want to remember."

Lady Ide drew a sharp breath and looked at him with frightened eyes.

"Has anyone been talking to you?" she asked. "Has one of those damned old cats at the club——"

"Certainly not," he assured her. "Just an idea of mine."

She didn't like his idea. She thought it was wrong of him to suggest things like that. She was feeling perfectly well. It was absurd of Cynthia to send for him. The dining-room had been too hot for the time of year—suffocating. She had become a little faint.

John didn't press the point. He chatted about other things—Cynthia's wedding, the weather, the new show at the Lyric. Then he rose to take his leave.

"If I were you, I should avoid being too strenuous for a time. You want a rest cure. . . . If I can be of help at any time——"

"Charming of you, Doctor. . . . And those naughty eyebrows of yours—so fascinating!"

She held his hand, and he noticed that she clutched it tight like a frightened child in the dark.

"I might like a good pal one of these days," she told him, lapsing into the language of her early years. "One doesn't have any friends in this kind of life. Not what I call real pals who would do one a good turn——"

She patted his hand with a very good pretence of the society lady, as imagined by herself.

"What a darling doctor you are! So sympathetic!"

John went out of the room, smiling, and closed the door behind him and stood out on the landing for a few moments, thinking. There was something wrong with Lady Ide. She wanted someone to help her. She was bothered about something—and undoubtedly drugging herself, to forget the bother. . . . Then he tapped at Cynthia's door, and heard her cry "Open Sesame!"

She was in a kind of workroom, littered with her wedding clothes. That white train which she was going to trail to the altar was carefully spread out on a long table—a wave of delicate lace. She was alone now and waiting for him, with a cigarette which she threw away when he came in.

“Does Basil Hyde play bridge while you stay up here?” asked John.

“I like to get away from him sometimes,” she answered with a comical smile. “We shall be together for a lifetime—afterwards. Rather terrifying, don’t you think?”

She did not wait for his answer, and asked another question.

“What do you make of mother?”

He told her that Lady Ide was not too well. Worrying about something, perhaps. Considerably run down—and depressed, he thought.

Cynthia agreed.

“I can’t make her out. She has been quite funny lately. Once or twice I couldn’t help thinking that she’s—well—frightened about something.”

“Frightened?”

John had also had that idea of a woman frightened about something.

Cynthia nodded.

“I’m almost certain it’s something to do with that poisonous little beast Benito. . . . That’s the boy she dances with. . . . He writes her letters which frighten her. I can see by the way she won’t read them when anybody’s looking, and by something in her eyes. Blue funk!”

“Blackmail?” asked John.

“Something of the kind.”

She turned away from him for a moment, and he noticed that absent-mindedly she took up a slip of stuff from the table—it looked like a chemise of rose-coloured silk—and let it drop on the floor as though the sight of it vexed her.

“Oh, there are lots of skeletons in the cupboards of this house,” she said. “Father’s room is stuffed with them, and now mother——”

She did not finish her sentence but stood facing him and looking

into his eyes sombrely—with a tragic look for a young girl on the eve of marriage.”

“Life is rather filthy, don’t you think?” she asked.

“Good God, no!” said John. “Why do you say that? It’s blasphemy. If one understands and has pity——”

“I don’t understand,” said Cynthia. “And I can’t be sure of anyone. I’m not sure of Basil. I believe all men are beasts . . . except you, Doctor!”

She put her hand on his arm and laughed, as though trying to take away the intensity of her last words.

“You go about like a priest,” she said. “Helping people.”

Dr. Jevons stood in front of this girl in the white frock who had come into his dreams sometimes, and his face coloured slightly as he smiled down at her.

“Oh, I’m quite human, like other men,” he told her. “The same weaknesses and the same beast in me.”

She wouldn’t believe it, and told him so. She was sure that he was an idealist, utterly self-sacrificing.

“An egoist,” he protested, “with more than my fair share of primitive impulses.”

He saw human nature as a conflict between the spirit and the flesh. But it didn’t do to deny the one or the other. They must both be in harmony. They both belonged to the divine idea.

“We can’t be entirely spiritual as long as we belong to life,” he said. “Perhaps you expect too much and go around looking for an angel?”

She quoted scripture at him laughingly.

“The devil goeth about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Especially in Cadogan Square.”

And then Basil Hyde appeared, preventing further conversation of this kind by a noisy entrance.

“Good heavens, Cynthia! Aren’t you coming down? I thought you were ill or something. . . . Oh, hullo, Doctor!”

“Just going,” said John.

XL

ON the day following his visit to Lady Ide John was kept busy with his patients and was home later than he need have been. He turned down Royal Avenue for the sake of a little fresh air on a zigzag route to the Embankment, where he liked to walk with his hat off sometimes and a sense of space about him, and a touch of loneliness not to be found along the King's Road.

It was a glamorous night of June and the leaves on the plane trees down Royal Avenue were still green above the lamps before another month would blacken them with soot. There was still some light left in the sky above the chimney-pots, and London was filled with a pearly twilight when it is most magical. Some of the little old houses down this avenue where no traffic is allowed had been newly painted, and their inhabitants had not troubled to pull their window blinds, so that the light from their rooms shone across the gravel roadway. From one of the open windows came the music of a gramophone—some jazz tune with its stuttering rhythm—and John guessed that Mr. Birdie Thistledown, that journalist, was entertaining some of his friends on an evening off from the newspaper office where Betty Truslove used her influence with him to get her stories printed. As he passed the house he glanced towards it with a smile. He liked that red-headed lad who hadn't turned a hair when Betty was sick in the fender. Someone was standing in the doorway, and he saw at a glance that it was that pretty Columbine—Miss Phyllis Dix—whose mother kept lodgings here. She was fumbling in her hand-bag for her latchkey, and couldn't find it, perhaps, because as the doctor passed he heard her say "Damn!" loud enough to reach his ears. He hesitated for a second, and then stopped and spoke to her.

"Got rid of that cough, Miss Dix?"

She started at the sound of his voice and jerked her head back as though annoyed, and perhaps alarmed at being accosted like this. Then she recognised him, and laughed.

"Oh, good evening, Doctor! . . . I must have forgotten the latchkey, and I expect mother has gone to bed. Well, I'll have to ring."

"Been dining out?" asked John.

She nodded.

"Oh, I lead a very gay life—now and then! Like Cinderella going to the ball."

She gave a tug at an old-fashioned bell.

"If I were you," said John, after a moment's silence, "I wouldn't choose a fairy prince who has a wife of his own and a grown-up daughter!"

He could see, even though the twilight which was darker in her doorway, a sharp flush of colour set her face on fire. But she turned on him sharply, like a little tiger cat.

"If I were you, I should mind my own business!"

Perhaps he deserved it. He had no right whatever to give moral advice to a little lady on the doorstep of her mother's house.

"Well," he said quietly, "as long as you know how to take care of yourself . . .!"

"Oh perfectly! Thank you very much."

She gave another tug at the old-fashioned bell angrily, and John said good evening and passed on. He was sorry he had made that remark. It was rather foolish of him, but he liked that little shop-girl, and he didn't like Sir Francis Ide. What an extraordinary thing that Cynthia's father should take this child out, when he entertained a smart set and had a choice of lovely ladies for his friendship. Perhaps it was the simplicity of this girl which appealed to him, and her ignorance of life. Or perhaps there was a hark back in his mind to the girls he had liked as a young man when he gave the glad-eye to little wenches along the Brixton High Road and got "sauced" for his cheek. Perhaps he felt more at ease in the company of a pretty shop-girl, and had more hero-worship, than when he dined with ladies who read high-brow books, and laughed at him because he didn't understand their wit, and despised him because

of his self-made success. And there was just a chance that he was giving this child a treat sometimes out of sheer good nature. It was fatal to think that people only behaved according to their lowest instincts. Even the coarsest type of men sometimes do a generous and sporting thing to satisfy a natural instinct of self-satisfaction which is as strong in human nature as more evil impulses.

John put the matter out of his mind. Miss Phyllis Dix was perfectly right in advising him to mind his own business, and that was to help people when they sent for him, but not otherwise. None whatever. On the contrary, he was most damnably aware of certain weaknesses and desires within his own mental make-up which wanted watching and self-control. Last night, for instance, he had been startled and rather scared by a sudden emotion that had taken hold of him when he was talking to Cynthia Ide. It was when she had said, "I believe all men are beasts—except you, Doctor." That trust in him, that childish faith in his idealism, her conviction that because he was a doctor he was immune from the ordinary instincts of human nature, had given him a bit of a jolt. At that very moment her beauty had got into his eyes so that he could hardly look at her. There was something about this girl which excited him, as though he were an adolescent boy who had fallen in love. The touch of her hand thrilled him. When she had put her hand on his arm his heart had given a queer lurch. Ever since he had first seen her she had put a kind of spell on him so that she came to him in dreams and was associated even in his waking mind with the beauty of life. It was beyond analysis. She wasn't voluptuous or alluring. On the contrary, she had the boyishness of so many modern girls. She wasn't one of those women who fascinate the senses. She was slim and unsensuous. She was just a very charming type of modern girlhood. And yet his pulse jumped when he was in her presence, and something mystical and magic seemed to touch him with a witchery he had never known with other girls. He felt devotional towards her, like a knight who wants to rescue his lady love from any dragons there may be about. Romantic, in the most ridiculous way!

Probably it was due to some harmony of vibrations. Something

came out of her to which he was attuned. She struck some chord in his subconsciousness. No, he couldn't get the hang of it—but this tall young beauty, with her frank eyes and way of speech, her belief in him as a rather rare soul, set him jangling and made him nervous of himself. For two pins he could be desperately in love with her, in a most unprofessional way.

The fact was, perhaps, that that human nature which she disbelieved in him was demanding satisfaction. There was something physical about it—what she would call beastly. Desire for the loveliness of life, a sudden revolt against loneliness and asceticism, the mating instinct, were beginning to stir in him with passion. This life of a general practitioner was hardly good enough as the be-all and end-all of life. He had a right to something more than that. Of course, he would never give up his job—he couldn't afford to! But it was a hard grind, and a lonely trail. As a doctor he was marked off from ordinary men—rather like a priest. People confessed to him, stripped themselves, body and soul, just as though he were someone apart from the rest, a kind of inhuman oracle in whom they had faith and from whom they expected miracles. It was all rubbish really. He was exactly like themselves, with the same weaknesses and the same ignorance, subject to the same strains.

And now he wanted love, like all those little shop-girls and city clerks. He wanted his mate, like any human animal. And the curse of it was that it was Cynthia Ide who was going to marry Basil Hyde—without much enthusiasm—with a sense of fear in her heart—who had put a spell on him, so that she walked with him now, in a haunting way, along this Embankment where he tried to get back to reason and common sense, with his hat off and the warm wind on his forehead and the darkness in his eyes.

Well, he would have to get back, or Janet would be anxious about him. Those tugs looked good, creeping down the old river with their lights reflected under the bridge. The ghosts of Roman galleys were passing too, if one's mind stood outside Time for a moment. . . .

Janet was alone when he returned after that walk. He had not been home since lunch and he thought she looked put out about something.

"Sorry to be late," he said. "Where's Adonis?"

"Gone," she told him.

"Gone? . . . Gone where?"

It appeared that he had gone away. She had persuaded him to go. There had been an emotional scene—and he had packed up his kit, called for a taxi and departed—under protest.

"So that's that," said Janet.

But that wasn't that, really, as John could see by her face. That is to say, she couldn't resume life again exactly as it had been before that boy had appeared. And his going meant that something serious had happened to her.

So John guessed, but she seemed to read what was going on in his mind, and reassured him.

"He hasn't gone away altogether. I mean we shall see him round here pretty often, I expect! The fact is I pushed him out. The situation was getting impossible in this little house."

"Not big enough for both of you?" asked John, feeling somewhat relieved.

"Hardly respectable with you away such a lot," she answered with her shy laugh. "Even Mrs. Meggs was beginning to look shocked. She happened to come in once or twice when Eric was behaving—emotionally."

"Poor old Mother Meggs!"

John laughed heartily at the thought of that lady's sensibilities outraged by the unconventional behaviour of a doctor's household. But that laughter covered a sense of uneasiness. He could not quite understand what had happened, even now. Perhaps Janet was sacrificing herself because of that difference in age, which, the more he came to think of it, the less important it seemed—if that boy were really sincere in his love. It was a mistake, he thought, to put up artificial barriers between human beings. Ten years meant nothing in spiritual time. Love could leap a gap like that, if it were spiritual as well as physical.

"He hasn't broken with me," said Janet in further explanation. "Nor I with him. As a matter of fact, John, I've promised to wear this trinket for a while—for six months, to be quite accurate. If he doesn't want it back by that time, then I shall wear it for ever with another one, less ornate. We'll see . . ."

She held out her hand underneath one of the shaded lamps, and the light sparkled on a little ring with five pearls.

"Good Lord!" said John. "Why did you push him out if you wear his ring? . . . I confess I don't understand."

She laughed at his mystification, though her mirth was tremulous.

"It was part of the contract," she explained. "We couldn't be engaged and live in the same house. At least, Eric couldn't. . . . He's so fearfully emotional. And then he became cross, or broken-hearted, or something. He thought I was hard. He said I was trying to wean him like a baby from its mother!"

She laughed again at that way of putting things, and then turned away and fingered a little ornament on the mantelpiece, as though afraid of showing her eyes.

"Perhaps that's true," she added. "He's such a baby. Anyhow, I'm giving him six months to grow up."

"And then?" asked John.

"Then I shall be six months older," she said with a break in her voice.

John went over to her and put his arm round her, and spoke more emotionally than he had the habit of doing.

"If I were you, I should take this boy's love, Jenny. I wouldn't 'wean' him, as you call it. There's something—well—spiritual about it, and he's delicate clay. He has a fine devotion to you, I honestly believe. And you mustn't be morbid about that other boy, my dear. The war is forgotten and all its ghosts. It's a hell of a long time ago now. You have life in front of you, and you've a right to motherhood and love. You've earned it, by God!"

"Thanks, John," she said. "We'll see how things work out. There's a lot might happen in six months."

She went to the piano and played in a dreamy way while he smoked his last pipe thoughtfully. He knew that underneath her self-control there was a yearning for that boy whose ring she wore, and that she had let him leave the house—pushed him out—to give him a chance of escape from a passion that might be only a passing weakness. It was a lesson to himself, that self-control. As a psychotherapist, or something of the sort, he was getting

scared by a surge of sentiment which was a nuisance. This passion stuff—how it interfered with the reasonable life of human beings! Perhaps it was a mistake to attach too much importance to ideal love—the choice of one woman or one man. Perhaps the Oriental way was better, keeping it subordinate to the main purpose of life. And yet the Western ideal of romantic love was a higher manifestation of the spiritual mind as it had developed throughout the ages from mere animalism. One had to pay the price of those finer sensibilities, as every advance had to be paid for, by a greater capacity for pain. Was it worth it, he wondered? It led to most damnable tragedies, and still more damnable disillusion. It was the cause of much agony, blind jealousies, broken lives and only once in a thousand times, or less, did it seem to lead to a perfect mating between a man and woman. It was an ideal which was almost unattainable, except by wonderfully spiritual natures, and yet the dream of it had put its spell over the Western mind so that all poetry, all novels, even those ridiculous pictures in the cinemas paid homage to it. Why should he be haunted by the beauty of that long-limbed girl who was going to marry Basil Hyde? As a man who knew something about psychology and had read up Freud and Jung, it was very unreasonable. Why shouldn't he pick out any other healthy young female and say, "Let's make a match of it"? Why should he desire one exquisite and unattainable Eve? It was idiotic—looked at biologically. Utter nonsense, really.

While Janet was playing the piano he went to the window and looked out into the lamp-lit twilight of a summer night.

How charming Cynthia had looked, in that room where they were making her wedding frocks! But that was a frightful thing she had said to him—"Life is rather filthy, don't you think?" Terrible for a young girl to say a thing like that. And she was frightened of marriage. She had a horror of it. Perhaps she ought not to marry Basil Hyde. It might lead to another tragedy, like so many of these fashionable weddings. Well, there was no stopping it now. No escape, as she had said one night in St. James's Square. . .

"What a deep sigh, Jacko!" said Janet, who was turning over

the leaves of her music book. "Don't worry about me, my dear."

"I'm worrying about myself," he answered with a laugh. "I'm no good unless I'm working. . . . That's a horrible confession of weakness. . . . What about bed?"

XLI

NOW that Janet wore a ring with five little pearls on her finger John had to spend lonely evenings sometimes. Having been "pushed out," for propriety's sake, or because of amorous impatience, Eric Pardoe assumed a lover's rights and sent for his lady at inconvenient hours. He had taken rooms in Jermyn Street—a lift up from that bed-sitting-room in Smith Street—and telegraph boys from the post office in the King's Road made a trail to the doctor's house in Walpole Street with pink envelopes addressed to Janet Jevons.

Dine with me to-night Claridges nine fifteen shall be in despair if you don't come Eric.

Meet me without fail Piccadilly tube station nine thirty seems thousand years since last saw you shall break contract if this separation continues Eric.

Will you be angelic and come studio eight o'clock cannot get away this foul place but could see you dressing-room and have left word doorkeeper Eric.

Several times Janet handed these telegrams to John with shy laughter and said, "Drat that boy! I don't think I shall go." But nearly always she did go, hesitating to the last minute, conscience-stricken if it meant leaving John to a lonely meal, but hurrying upstairs to dress in time for that new assignation.

She looked younger and happier John noticed. There was a new and shining light in her eyes. He caught her smiling to herself when she thought no one was looking at her. There was more colour in her face although she kept late hours now on those nights-out, and John was in bed—generally reading—before he heard her key in the lock of the front door, and the slight rustle of her frock as she came upstairs.

"Hullo, Jenny! How's the gay life?"

She came into his bedroom and sat on the side of his bed and

reported the programme of the evening, leaving out, no doubt, little episodes not meant for publication—that boy's way of love-making and his private conversation.

"Dinner at a Russian restaurant in Soho. Rather fun, John. You ought to come with me one day. . . . Then a dance at the Kit Cat. The Prince of Wales was there."

Then another kind of evening.

"I went up to the studio. They kept Eric hanging about until nine o'clock and then didn't want him after all. He was furious. Some of the film actors looked frightfully tired. But it was all very interesting. I wish you would come one day. Eric would be delighted if you would. He has a great affection for you, John. You're his ideal! His devotion to you is really dog-like."

John grinned at that.

"He hides it pretty well! Didn't even say thank you when I saved his life one night."

"Oh, that's shyness, and the modern way."

It appeared that Eric stood a real chance of becoming one of the English stars. Mr. Braithwaite thought a lot of him. He could act and he had a face and figure which put a spell on a movie audience. They were getting good reports about "The Passions of Pamela." But, of course, this new production—"The Compact of Love"—was going to give him big publicity.

"What do you talk about all the time?" asked John. "Isn't five hours rather long for a *tête-à-tête*?"

Eric did most of the talking, she explained, with smiling reminiscence. He wasn't quite so bitter about life. But sometimes he frightened her because of his cynicism and revolt against the older crowd, and England, and the state of the world generally. Any reference to the war disgusted him. It was what she had noticed with other boys who hadn't been in it. She wondered sometimes if it was fear—lest it should happen again and catch them unawares. But, of course, in her case it was a reminder of that difference in age. He hated it when she remembered things that happened when he was a small boy at school.

"Sometimes he's quite startled," said Janet. "He stares at me incredulously and says, 'Surely you can't remember that?' as if I were referring to a personal acquaintance with Queen Elizabeth

or Cleopatra. It makes him feel uncomfortable. But he's very sweet about it and pretends that it doesn't matter. Just a joke between him and me."

"Are you happy with him?" asked John frankly. "That's the only thing that matters. Would you like to live with the lad now that you're getting to know him better?"

Janet turned her eyes away so that he could only see her profile.

"I'm quite happy with him. . . . Ridiculously happy when I dupe myself into the belief that it's going to last. He's just like those boys we used to know, now that he's not so neurotic. The same shyness, and the same kind of way of pretending to be very old and blasé. But all the time I see how young he is, how perfectly ignorant of himself, how childish. I feel a thousand years old sometimes when he talks about love and things like that as though they had just happened for the first time."

"Well, he seems to amuse you," admitted John grudgingly. "And this night life seems to agree with you."

"I'm just dreaming," she told him. "It's quite a nice dream while it lasts. A fairy-tale for an old maid."

"Rubbish," said John. "But it's time you were in bed, young woman, and anyhow I've lost my beauty sleep, confound it."

"Sorry!"

She kissed him on the forehead and slipped out of his room, and he heard her bedroom door shut.

On some of those evenings when Janet was out John spared Mrs. Meggs the trouble of getting dinner for him and sloped round to small restaurants in Chelsea and, more particularly, to one restaurant in King's Road where he was apt to meet that journalist girl, Betty Truslove, and her colleague, Birdie Thistledown, that red-headed young man, and others of their set. They had been good enough to make a place for him in their company and he was glad to join in their conversation.

They talked of books a good deal. It was extraordinary the number of novels they read and the violence with which they discussed them. For the older novelists—honoured names to him—they had a profound contempt. Miss Betty Truslove agreed with Mr. Birdie Thistledown, that Galsworthy ought to be put into a home for incurables. Mr. Thistledown agreed with Miss Truslove

that Arnold Bennett ought to be quietly removed to a lethal chamber in the Battersea Home for Lost Dogs. They sighed and shook their heads at the mention of H. G. Wells. A damned soul! They laughed with a kind of pity at John's enthusiastic reference to Joseph Conrad; one of the romantics, they thought, and utterly out of touch with modern thought. But they became excited about a novel written by a girl of nineteen who had revealed the life of drab women—poor dears!—in the neighbourhood of the London Docks. They were filled with admiration for a novel by a Somerville girl which had just been banned by the libraries. They spoke in low and reverent tones of a masterpiece just produced by a German Jew describing the immoralities of a small German State in the eighteenth century. They talked of art, music, poetry with an enthusiastic admiration for those who were in revolt against tradition. Watching and listening as an outsider until they drew him into their discussions, John noticed that these young intellectuals had no interest whatever in social conditions or political controversies.

"My dear Doctor," said young Thistledown when John made a reference to politics, "surely you don't take that sort of thing seriously? I mean you don't really believe that it is going to make the slightest difference to anyone whether the Conservatives get beaten by Labour or whether the last of the Liberals dies in his sleep?"

"I'm rather inclined to think these things are important," said John cautiously.

There was a ripple of laughter round the table.

"I can't see that it matters much what the politicians say, or do, or fail to say or do. Even their dishonesty is no longer amusing. Their lies no longer deceive anyone. They just don't count in the scheme of things. We are making our own laws, and going our own little ways as if they didn't exist. They *don't* exist. They don't even realise, poor dears, that they're dead, and the world is moving on without them, to new ideas and new ways of life."

"What ways of life?" asked John. "I'd like to know."

Betty raised her forefinger.

"Ah!" she said mysteriously, as though not telling.

Then she looked at Birdie Thistledown and they laughed

together at some priceless but secret joke. Of course, they didn't know. They hadn't the slightest idea in what direction the world was drifting. All they had really decided was that they were not going to pay any attention to tradition, conventions or "stuffy" old ideas.

"One can't afford to leave politics alone," suggested John. "Those fellows in the Government have a habit of arranging things without our consent. Then they spring them on us when we're not looking. Laws we don't like. Wars we don't want."

"Oh, no," said Betty. "We're going to ignore all that. Aren't we, Birdie?"

"A law unto ourselves," agreed the red-headed young man, offering John a cigarette out of a paper packet.

For a moment he condescended to speak seriously, looking into John's eyes, with a smiling sincerity.

"If you're thinking of poison gas and high explosives you can set your mind at rest. We're not going to be caught in that kind of trap. Those old people who go on building battleships and preparing for the next war will find that we're not interested. And by 'we' I mean everyone like ourselves in France and Germany and other countries who got fooled by the last convulsion of political madness. We shall just laugh if anyone wants us to make war against somebody else. It will be like the mother-in-law joke, by a red-nosed comedian. Funny old stuff."

"I hope you're right," said John. "But we didn't believe much in war in 1913. We were very surprised when it happened."

"Inevitable!" exclaimed Birdie Thistledown. "We had all been asking for it, I imagine, though it was slightly before my time. Our minds hadn't got beyond it. Now we believe in different values. The wireless and other useful agencies have broken down the old frontiers of thought. Perhaps biology has had something to do with it. The human mind has gone forward to a new chapter of evolution. The old fetishes have lost their terror."

"We've put them on the scrap heap," said Betty Truslove. . . . "What about a liqueur, Birdie? Just as a treat."

"Can't afford it," said Thistledown. "We had an expensive week."

John stood the liqueurs. It was amusing to listen to these people,

so confident, so self-assured, so indifferent to the fears that lurked in his own mind. All about him at different tables lit by shaded lamps in this little restaurant other people of the same kind were talking earnestly to each other through a bluish haze of cigarette smoke. Now and again he overheard scraps of this table-talk.

"The more I see of men the more I love my dog," said a girl with her elbows dug into the table-cloth, and her chin on her folded hands, to another girl who was powdering her nose with the aid of a little mirror in her hand-bag.

"What about old Einstein?" asked a young man with a touch of side-whiskers to a girl with an Eton crop. "There's no such thing as Time. Regarded from the point of view of a star a million light years away we aren't here yet. To a mind that gets outside Time it's all the Present. Everything that has happened and everything that will happen is just part of the same picture."

"You can't make me believe that you haven't eaten that apple dumpling, my dear," said the girl. "The indigestion that will follow is in the future. One thing happens after another."

"Women's logic!" exclaimed the side-whiskered young man. "And here have I been trying to interpret great mysteries! Imbecile that I am!"

At the far end of the room a young man with a lock of black hair over his forehead was making a sketch of John on the back of an envelope. Amused by his eyebrows, perhaps. And on the other side of the room, lonely at table, sat a lady with a monocle reading a book propped up against the water bottle and so absorbed in it that she sprinkled the sugar in her soup and then gave a cry of dismay.

All these customers of the restaurant were the people John met in the King's Road and sometimes in their rooms when they fell ill of influenza and other maladies. They were wage-earners, as journalists, artists, shop-girls, typists. Some of them were hard-up towards the end of the week when they chose the cheapest things on the menu. But they were getting a good deal of fun out of life, in a nervy, sensitive, intellectual way. They were interested in ideas, responsive to all those new vibrations which travelled through the ether, over the wireless, or from mind to mind. They were certain of nothing except of their own essential rightness in the scheme of things, probing everything, however ugly or horrible,

talking "sex stuff" with the frankness of Freudian psychologists, and at the same time remaining curiously untouched, he thought, by degeneracy or morbidity, and keeping their sense of humour. . . . Something was happening in the world and in the secret cities of the mind. All over Europe there were people like this, he guessed, in little restaurants like this, talking and talking, and sometimes, perhaps, but not often, thinking and thinking. They were expressing a common philosophy of revolt against old ideas and conventions, criticising social customs, setting up new standards of value, dethroning authority. They were intolerant of all insincerity, and worshipful only of what they believed to be Truth, though it seemed to alter with each tick of the clock.

"It's the beginning of a new era," thought John answering some question of Betty Truslove about Vitamin A. "The past is slipping away from us and we still pretend that it's the present. God knows what is going to happen to the children of these children. But I rather like them, and I want to get inside their minds."

XLII

THAT evening a future guardian of law and order, a terror to the midnight burglar and a disentangler of traffic, terrestrial or aerial, was born into the world when Mrs. Widgery had her third baby in Draycott Avenue, Chelsea. The infant's first cry was a promise of stalwart manhood, and Police Constable Widgery was fully justified when he regarded his son for the first time and said, "He'll be a credit to the Force."

Dr. Jevons who had assisted this new recruit lingered at the invitation of the proud father—who suggested a "spot" in his front parlour before he went on night duty—and John raised his glass to the health of the babe.

"Not a bad job, yours, Widgery," he remarked by way of conversation. "You and I see a lot of life if we keep our eyes open."

"Ah!" said the constable darkly. "And the more I see of it the less I like it. No discipline, as you might say. Very disorderly in my opinion. Some people have all the luck. Other people are down-and-out. You'd be surprised at the misery that's hidden away in some of these back streets, Doctor. Something awful! And then we say we won the war!"

John wasn't surprised at the misery hidden away in back streets. He had seen it. . . . Two old sisters in Tryon Place who had died of starvation. . . . A man who hanged himself because he couldn't get work—within a stone's throw of luxury. All very "disorderly," he agreed.

"Not that I've anything to complain of myself," said Widgery. "Nice little dug-out don't you think?"

He looked round his front parlour with an air of pride, as he stood with his helmet on the table before him revealing his well-plastered hair curled into a quiff over his forehead. Above the fireplace was an overmantel of bamboo laden with pink vases and china ornaments among which was "A present from Brighton."

There were several small tables about the room supporting photographs in silver frames—mostly of private soldiers in khaki—and on a cottage piano in the corner was an enlarged photo of Widgery as a sergeant in the Buffs.

"Never thought I should get back to a place like this when I lay on my belly in No Man's Land," he said, seeing the doctor's eyes on those photographs. . . . "Most of the boys are dead now, poor chaps. They belong to the Two Minutes' Silence. Well, better p'raps than playing a one-string fiddle up the King's Road—or putting 'Blind' round one's neck and waiting for coppers from kind ladies."

"Awful, that!" said John.

He took up his hat and gloves and prepared to depart, but Widgery was excited by the advent of a future member of the police force.

"People think we're a bit comic—the police," he said. "And I don't deny we have our comic side, standing in the middle of the road with white armlets, or prowling round the railings in rubber shoes. Others think we have a downer on them. Always saying 'pass along please,' and 'now then, what's all this?' and 'move on there,' when they want to see a bit of fun. But in my experience, Doctor, the police has hearts like anybody else. Why, I'd give quids sometimes not to run in a poor fellow who's pinched something because his wife's going to have a baby and the rent's not paid. I tell you this, Doctor, when I walks round my beat I'm sorry for most of the people I meet. They're worried with life, that's what they are. It's too rough on them. It's done the dirty on them. All this unemployment breaks their spirit. No wonder some of them puts their heads into gas ovens as the best way out. . . . People says the police hasn't a heart. As if a uniform alters nature!"

John thought it did sometimes but he didn't say so. He was quite sure Constable Widgery had a heart. And before he went he said something which had been in his mind.

"By the by, Widgery, how's that pretty sister-in-law of yours—Phyllis Dix?"

"Oh, as mischievous as a cart-load of monkeys!" said Widgery, laughing. "And much too pleased with herself to notice a policeman even though he is her brother-in-law. A spanking wouldn't do that young wench any harm."

"Well, if I were you I'd keep a friendly eye on her. Only don't say I said so."

"Nothing wrong, I hope," said the constable anxiously.

"Oh, Lord, no," said John. "Only she's remarkably pretty. And you know some of these men about——"

"If I catch one of them on the prowl after Phyllis——"

Police Constable Widgery looked as if he wouldn't let his heart stand in his way if he caught anyone on the trail of that pretty sister-in-law.

XLIII

IT is impossible or at least difficult to put down life with its unexciting hours, its dullnesses, its scattered interests, its inconsequential episodes, its triviality of detail. More even than most men John was involved in a drudgery of routine, though now and then it was broken by an unusual case. His personal contacts were more scattered than those of ordinary professional men who go to an office at a certain hour and meet the same little group. He was always going off at tangents. He followed no main thread of plot. Every day, almost, he found himself in the presence of some new patient and penetrating the corridors of some different mind. It is therefore untrue to the adventure of his mind if one fixes one's attention upon these few people who happened to touch his home life—that boy Eric Pardoe, the Ides, Nina Ziborova, Smudge and his wife, Lucy, Betty Truslove and young Thistle-down. They did not absorb his attention. On the contrary they slipped out of his thoughts when he was busy with some case which presented unusual difficulties or went on his rounds to patients who needed him at the moment. He forgot himself and his own troublesome instincts—those day-dreams!—when he was doing his job at the bedside of an agonised woman, or trying to straighten out the psychology of a neurasthenic girl who had got things all wrong and was thinking herself ill, cleaning and patching up the body and soul of a man who had been poisoning himself with drink or debauchery.

At times he came back to a consciousness of his own personality with a kind of mental jolt. "Why am I working like this?" he asked himself. "What am I getting out of it? What intellectual or spiritual satisfaction?" The material rewards were not magnificent. He was just paying his way, with a bit over. Quite a number of his patients lived in Poverty Street and he did not press them for fees. In any case he was not out for money for its own

sake. He dressed shabbily, ate sparingly, had few expensive tastes. But there were times when he craved for a release from drudgery and an escape from squalor—those slums into which he dived for maternity cases and sick calls. There was a touch of the artist in him so that he desired beauty sometimes like strong drink and that was not to be found in the mean streets on the north side of King's Road. And he was sufficiently of an egotist, as he had once told Cynthia Ide, to feel the usual instincts of human nature—the fulfilment of desires, the full expression of his individuality. As it was, he had not much of a life of his own. He was outside the game, really, or at least he felt aloof and isolated, sometimes, as a priest must be—in the world but not of the world. He helped people into life and out of it. They sent for him when something had gone wrong with body or mind just as they might send for the plumber to mend their pipes or a mechanic to look at a broken-down car. He was treated with respect, as an expert who ought to know, but not with comradeship and intimacy. He had not been long enough as a general practitioner to be the family friend, trusted with every secret. London was different from the country in that respect. London patients changed their doctors as they did their frocks, at least as they did their houses and flats. Many patients sent for him for some trivial trouble—a dose of influenza, a bad headache, a touch of ptomaine, and that was the last he ever saw of them. Perhaps it was for that reason he felt lonely sometimes now that Janet was out so much with Eric Pardoe. Once or twice lately on warm August evenings when he was trudging home to that little house in Walpole Street, he was overcome by this sense of loneliness. All the people about him were rushing off to their family life, or going off for an evening's fun, but he, as a poor devil of a doctor, was tied to a telephone and if it didn't ring he would sit alone in his study reading a book and getting just a little "hipped." There was not a single house in London into which he could drop casually as a friend and not as a doctor. London was the loneliest city on God's earth if one happened to be outside the swim of human sociability.

So he thought one evening as he sloped along the Embankment when Janet was off again to meet Eric, and then, having thought so, pulled himself up sharply for this pessimism.

"Good heavens, I'm getting neurasthenic," he said aloud. "I'm indulging in self-pity—the inexcusable sin. A liver pill for you, my lad!"

The truth was that he was getting jaded owing to hard work and a hot August. He had not had much of a respite ever since he had put out that brass plate on his door.

Once or twice he was startled by a queer kind of absent-mindedness which came to him, suddenly, crossing a street so that taxis swirled about him with a squeal of brakes and a scatter of sparks. He had a sense of getting outside his body as though he were dematerialised. At such times he had an illusion of being able to see everything at once—the whole life of London, for instance, and every individual in it, and every mind belonging to the individual. The roar of the traffic in all its streets came to him as one deep rhythmic beat like the driving shaft of an immense machine. All these millions of people around him seemed to him like ants in one great ant-heap which he could see at a glance, urged into a ceaseless activity for some biological purpose of which they were unaware, driven by some evolutionary law, mating, breeding, toiling according to an urge of instinct against which they were powerless to rebel. All those blocks of flats along the Embankment, all the people inside them meant nothing more than an ant-heap in relation to the illimitable universe. All their agonies, their passions, their strivings and their hopes were of no more importance in the eternal drama than the tiny pandemonium of insects in a patch of grass. How futile for a general practitioner to get worried because one of his patients had a tumour in the breast. How foolish to think that he could do something with psychotherapy when body and mind were subject to biological impulses which kept them fretful for some purpose in the process of life which no one knew.

"Lord!" said Dr. Jevons, leaning over the parapet of the Embankment. "Why am I thinking like that? And I don't believe it! It's because I went without lunch to-day."

Another time when this absent-mindedness took possession of him he was walking along Knightsbridge in the full glare of the midday sun with a smell of tar and petrol in his nostrils and a glare of burnished metal in his eyes as the cars poured down in their unceasing tide and he had that disembodied feeling again, but this

time everything about him seemed etherealised and he had a sense of extraordinary awareness of London as a city of the spirit. Its houses and shops, its motor-cars and buses were insubstantial. All these girls in summer frocks and sun-flushed faces were ideas that passed through the mind of God for a moment. There was nothing real but the spirit, but that was the enormous reality which explained everything if one could only get at it. Perhaps that was what they were all trying to find out. Every endeavour of life perhaps was to get closer into touch with the universal spirit. All this pain, this laughter, these matings, and struggles, and failures, and miseries, and mental distresses might be the effort of humanity to get into harmony with spiritual truth. His own little endeavours to arrange some harmony between mind and body were part of that effort of human intelligence to get beyond illusion to eternal truth. It was worth doing really. In a way he was a servant of the spirit world which was the only reality. Let's see, where was he? Oh Lord, yes, Knightsbridge and nearly as far as Rutland Gate with a bit of a headache.

And then again, in Kensington Gardens, one afternoon when he went for a lonely stroll he had an extraordinary vision of Cynthia Ide. He saw her as in life although he knew somehow that she was not there in the body. She was standing beyond the trees in a white frock and the sun shone on her fair hair with a kind of glamour. She turned and came towards him with her hands outstretched as though appealing for help. He was quite certain that she wanted him to help her in some way. . . . But she wasn't there and a nursemaid with a perambulator passed across the patch of grass where he had seen her.

"That's funny!" exclaimed Dr. Jevons, rather frightened of himself.

All of which is a way of saying that he had been overworking, through a vile winter followed by a hot summer, busy with a daily drudgery from which he didn't spare himself. He was subject to the usual strain of London life.

XLIV

LADY IDE was unwell again, and it was Sir Francis who rang up the doctor. John was shown into his study and found him smoking a cigar as usual at four in the afternoon and looking worried. He was worried about his wife, he explained. She had been "devilish queer" lately. He couldn't make her out at all. His daughter—Cynthia—had spoken to him about it. She was scared, poor child, and no wonder.

"I'm afraid it's mental," said Sir Francis Ide.

"What makes you think that?" asked John.

Sir Francis hesitated, and his florid skin deepened in colour as he blew the ash off his cigar. It appeared that Lady Ide got "rattled" if he went anywhere near her. She seemed afraid of him. She became hysterical when he asked her questions.

"Is she afraid of your finding out something?" asked John bluntly.

Sir Francis shrugged his shoulders and gave an uneasy laugh.

"I dare say she has her little secrets as we all have. Of course, we've been leading our own lives for some years past. She has her own friends like I have mine."

He paced about the room with a heavy worried frown, as though trying to find some clue to his wife's illness.

"It's something to do with that damn necklace," he said presently. "Whenever I mention it she goes off the deep end and has a heart attack or a brain storm."

John ventured to suggest that it might be better not to mention it, but Sir Francis did not seem to welcome this advice.

"It cost me a hell of a lot of money. . . . And if there's one thing I hate it's not being able to trust my own servants."

As far as John could make out there had been a painful scene after lunch when he had insisted upon "sacking" Lady Ide's maid. Perhaps he had been a trifle strong in his language, he

admitted. Her ladyship had become hysterical again—lost her self-control completely, so that she frightened the servants. They must have thought he had been trying to murder her! Fortunately his daughter was out for lunch. She looked at him sometimes as though it was all his fault—her mother's ill-health. Well, he didn't pose as a saint or anything like that, but he had been an easy-going husband. He had nothing on his conscience as far as that was concerned. She had always had what she wanted—and a bit over. He had never blamed her for spilling the money about. He had been proud of the way she kept her looks, and although he had gone off on little adventures now and then—being human—he'd always had a sense of loyalty to this little lady of his. They had been poor together, and now they were rich together, and it was damned hard that she should be taken queer like this.

He rambled on in a kind of confession, or defence, as so many people did to a doctor who was called in at a moment of crisis. There seems to be some need in the human heart to confess itself, and a doctor is like a priest in some ways, impersonal and pledged to secrecy, and tolerant to human weakness. It was as Cynthia's father that he interested John. All her life that girl had been surrounded by his loose-living friends, in an atmosphere of vulgarity and wealth. She must have guessed or understood, even as a school-girl, that her father was a man of loose morals—indulging in those "little adventures" as he called them—getting his name into the newspapers in scandalous divorce cases, according to Betty Truslove who had reported one of them. Some of her mother's friends must have been rather objectionable—"poisonous," as she would say in the language of her own crowd. As a schoolgirl, home for the holidays, she must have heard their loose talk, their loud laughter over cocktails and liqueurs, their innuendoes, and nudges, and nods at risky stories, their swear-words and smart slang. He could imagine all that after a glance at those photographs on her father's mantelpiece, inscribed to "Dear old Frank" from laughing ladies. Sir Francis and Lady Ide had sent her to a convent school and then perhaps were on their best behaviour when she came home—this slim, flower-like beauty who had never been touched by the vulgarities in which their own minds were steeped. This man had petted and pampered her, but had not been able to hide his coarse-

ness, so that she despised him and was afraid of the evil streak in him which stirred a secret disgust in her. All that was fairly obvious, and rather tragic, as far as Cynthia was concerned, when Sir Francis Ide blurted out his confessions which revealed the inner nature of the man.

"All this between you and me, Doctor," he said presently, and then rang the bell and told the maid to conduct Dr. Jevons to her ladyship.

John went upstairs and was shown into Lady Ide's room. She was lying on her bed with her eyes closed, and when he spoke to her she stared at him in a dazed way for a few moments before recognising him. Then she smiled with her lips, and made an effort to speak brightly.

"I feel bad, Doctor. So silly!"

She was bad. Her pulse was decidedly weak. Her heart action was feeble. She had all the symptoms of reaction after some dangerous and stimulating drug.

Dr. Jevons talked to her quietly, soothingly, and moved about the room, looking at little bottles on the dressing-table, glancing at her boxes of cosmetics and face powders, while she lay there on the bed with her eyes closed.

Presently she spoke to him sharply, with a sudden suspicion and fear.

"What are you looking for?"

"That stuff," said John. "That horrible stuff you take for your headaches, Lady Ide."

She breathed jerkily and put her fingers to her throat.

"Oh, my God!" she said in a kind of whimper. "Oh, my God!"

She flung her arm across the bed and began to moan.

"Where do you get it?" asked John. "Who gives it to you?"

She moaned more loudly, and began to sob.

"Hush!" said John. "Hush! Please don't get excited. I'm only anxious to be of use to you."

"I must have it, Doctor," she said presently. "For God's sake don't take it from me!"

He tried to find it by a superficial examination of those little bottles and boxes, but he was unsuccessful. She had hidden it

cunningly. It would need a careful search to find that white powder for which he was looking.

He sat down by her bedside and she clutched his hand and held it tight.

"Tell me," he said, "where do you get it, Lady Ide? It's not good to take it, you know. You're just killing yourself. It's not fair on Cynthia, is it?"

He spoke quietly, good-naturedly, like a friend anxious to help her, and his words seemed to get into her drugged mind and stir some emotion, so that tears trickled down her painted face.

"Poor darling Cynthia!" she cried weakly.

She began to sob again, harshly, and then became hysterical. It was almost half an hour before the doctor could get her calm again, when she lay back clutching his hand as though it gave her some comfort.

"Tell me as a friend," said John. "What's your trouble, Lady Ide? I'd be glad to help—as a good pal, you know!"

He used the words she had spoken on his last visit, and he could feel the pressure of her hand, as though that word "pal" appealed to her.

"It's that boy Benito," she said presently, with a wail of anguish. "He taught me how to take it. . . . He sends it to me if I pay him enough. . . . I have to keep bribing him. . . . And now he's blackmailing me, the little wretch. . . . Some silly letters of mine. . . . He threatens to send them to Francis."

She broke into hysterical weeping again, and John had to hold her because she shook with a kind of ague.

"I'm afraid because of Cynthia," she wailed. "My darling Cynthia! . . . If she knew what a silly fool I am. . . ."

It was a little later that she told him the whole miserable cause of her anguish and fear. It wasn't a pretty story. That dancing boy, Benito, was always demanding more money, pretending that he was going to be arrested for debt. Then he wouldn't let her have any more of that stuff until she sent him what he wanted, so that she nearly went mad without it. Now he threatened to post her letters to Sir Francis. They were silly love letters she had written to him; mad letters which filled her with horror when she thought of them. Cynthia would die of shame if she ever saw them. It was that stuff

which had made her write them. She had written them when she was in a trance-like state; all sorts of hideous nonsense which surged up in her mind; like the love dreams of a passionate hussy. Sometimes she thought an evil spirit had dictated them. . . . She couldn't get hold of the money he wanted. She had bad luck at Monte last time and was afraid to tell Francis how much she had lost. So she had sent Benito that pearl necklace and had lied to the police about it. Of course, they would find out if he tried to sell it. Perhaps he was afraid of selling it. He asked for more money and he wouldn't let her have any more stuff until she sent it. It was driving her crazy.

Dr. Jevons listened to her ravings, her agony of fear, her wailings. She was scared to death lest Cynthia should get to know about those letters. It was always Cynthia that was in her mind.

"You had better let me go and see that boy," suggested John. "Where does he live?"

That frightened her at first. It was a long time before he could persuade her to give him the address. But he got it from her at last—it was a flat in Duke Street, St. James's—and he promised to send her round something which would soothe her nerves and take away that desperate craving for a drug which had such horrible effects.

He had opened another door in the hidden city and had peered into its demon-haunted darkness with a sense of pity and alarm.

XLV

DOCTOR JEVONS drove to St. James's Square and left his car where he had met Cynthia and Basil Hyde that evening when Eric had stood treat at the Carlton. Then he walked to Duke Street and found the number of the house where that dancing boy lived. It was a picture shop, and in the side doorway was a visiting-card tacked on to a board with other names.

Mr. Benito Birziska.

Underneath the name the words "Fourth floor" were scribbled in pencil, and John trudged up flights of uncarpeted stairs until he came to the door on which another card had been nailed. There was no answer to the bell until he had rung three times, though he could see a light in the passage and thought he heard someone moving. Then the door opened and he saw the dark young man who had been pointed out to him as a "lounge-lizard" at Lady Ide's dance.

He was in evening clothes already—at half-past six—but wore a black silk dressing-gown tied round his waist with a cord instead of a dinner jacket, and there were scarlet slippers on his feet. He was smoking a cigarette as he held the door open and looked at John with surprise and, perhaps, just a hint of apprehension.

"Please?" he asked.

"I'm a doctor," explained John politely. "I want to have a word with you about one of my patients. One of the ladies who pay you to dance with them."

He saw the boy—he was certainly quite young—hesitate for a second with a sudden suspicion or fear in his eyes. His hand trembled slightly as he drew a whiff from his cigarette.

"Please come in."

He held the door open wider and then led the way to a room elegantly furnished, but more like a young woman's boudoir than a young man's sitting-room, and dimly lit with a few shaded lamps,

rose-coloured. The chairs were covered with flowered chintz and there was one tall lily in a vase on a little table which held a silver cigarette box. By the window was a rosewood piano, and on the other side of the room an elaborate-looking gramophone in a lacquered case. Somewhere a joss-stick was burning, filling the room with a heavy scent.

"You are a doctor!" asked the young man with only the slightest trace of a foreign accent.

"Dr. Jevons of Walpole Street, Chelsea."

Benito, as they called him, thrust the fingers of his right hand through the black cord round his waist and stared at the rug beneath his feet, as though wondering which of his ladies lived near Walpole Street, Chelsea.

"May I enquire the name of the lady who is one of your patients, and why you come to see me?" he asked, raising his dark eyes to look at John.

"Certainly," said John. "That's what I have come to tell you. I have called on behalf of Lady Ide."

He saw Benito give a slight start, and in spite of the dim rose-coloured light, he thought he saw the tone of his face change to an ivory pallor. But he spoke again very politely.

"Oh, dear Lady Ide! . . . I hope she is not unwell. . . . She has been extremely kind to me."

"Yes," said John. "So I understand. You will be sorry to hear that she is very ill—mentally as well as physically."

Benito was sorry to hear it. He expressed his regrets with much sympathy. Would the doctor care to take a cigarette? And would he be good enough to explain in what way he, Benito, could be of any service to Lady Ide in her illness?

John refused the cigarette. The one smoked by this young man was disgustingly scented.

"Look here," he said, "I'm going to speak bluntly, if I may."

The dancing boy made a gesture with his hands as though to say "Pray do!"

"I'm afraid you are the cause of Lady Ide's illness, Mr. Benito. Whatever-it-is," said John quietly.

The dark young man moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue, and there was a slight tremor in his voice when he answered.

"I? My dear doctor. . . . Do you mean, perhaps, that Lady Ide has been dancing too much?"

John leaned forward a little in his chair and stared this boy in the eyes.

"I don't mean that. I mean that you have been teaching her to take that filthy dope of yours. Cocaine. And having weakened her will power, you are now blackmailing her about some letters. Also, there is a little question of a pearl necklace."

Benito Birziska took out a dainty handkerchief from his pocket and pressed it between the palms of his hands—delicate womanish hands—as though they were wet.

"I have come in a friendly way," said John, "friendly to Lady Ide—to make you stop this kind of thing before the police get on to you."

The young man listened attentively. His face was dead white now, and he dropped his cigarette into the fireplace as though it had sickened him.

"I do not understand you," he said quietly. "Dope? . . . Blackmail? . . . Those are very unpleasant words, I think."

"Extraordinarily unpleasant," agreed John. "And there's another unpleasant word which I added to them. The police. I am sorry to mention it."

Mr. Benito Birziska—the doctor wondered what on earth his nationality might be—lost his pose of polite misunderstanding.

"Have you come here to threaten me?" he asked with a sudden anger that made his voice shrill. "The police? What the devil do you mean?"

"I've come to warn you," said John quietly. "You know the penalties for carrying dope and blackmailing women. I shall hand you over to the police unless you give me those letters from Lady Ide, and stop all further communications with her. Also I advise you to return that pearl necklace before it gets traced to you."

Benito's dark eyes blazed with a sudden fury and he lost all grip on self-control, so that he stuttered and trembled with an emotional storm.

"I—I advise you to go to hell and d-d-damnation."

"No," said John. "That's where you are in danger of going pretty fast. I'd like to save you before you get there. That drug

habit is as bad for you as it is for Lady Ide and other women who play about with you. . . . Now, pull yourself together and hand over those letters to start with. I'm not going without them."

Mr. Benito Birziska used his dainty handkerchief to wipe his lips. He was breathing jerkily and looked as though he might faint. John felt sorry for him. Probably he had drifted into this sort of thing through weakness at first. No doubt he had a bad history behind him of parentage and upbringing and social disadvantages. *Tout savoir c'est tout pardonner*, even in a case like this.

Benito paced up and down the room in that black silk dressing-gown and those scarlet slippers, and there was a queer grace about him revealing the professional dancer. He held his head up as though wanting more air than there was in this scented room, and several times passed a hand over his forehead as though to wipe away a cold sweat. Then he moved over to a little cabinet to the right of the fireplace and pulled open a drawer.

So he was going to hand over the letters!

But it was not a packet of letters he pulled out. It was something which John saw with a flash of an eye, and didn't like.

"Now then, don't be silly!" he said sharply. "You blasted young fool!"

The dancing boy was preparing to be extraordinarily silly. But he wasn't quite quick enough. John had knocked that thing out of his hand—a dainty little weapon of shining steel—before he could do anything foolish with it. But now the boy flung himself at John, trying to get at his throat with crisped fingers, clawing and scratching with a fury in his eyes.

Like a snake, rather, he was, as he writhed about John's body, strong with hysterical rage, and venomous. One of the rose-coloured lamps fell off the table with a crash and went out. The tall lily in its vase lay broken on the carpet, and was trampled by the feet of the doctor struggling with this young neurotic. The silver box went over with the table and its cigarettes, those sticks of scented nastiness, were spilt and scattered. He was very vicious, that dancing boy, as John found when one of his fingers was bitten to the bone. That snake bite was too much for the temper of a good-natured man. He hit the boy each side of his face sharply with the back of his hand, and then swung him across the room so that he fell

with a thud, hitting his head with a crack against the sharp edge of the rosewood piano.

"Sorry to be so rough," said John, breathing rather hard. "But you asked for it, you know. I don't like little boys who bite."

There was no answer from Mr. Benito Birziska. For the moment he was incapable of answering, being quite unconscious. John bent over him, pulled him straighter on to the floor and felt his heart. . . . Nothing worse than a bad headache for him somewhat later. Serve him right for being so silly.

John straightened himself up, and rearranged his collar and tie, which felt a bit rumpled. In some odd way his tie had twisted round to the back of his neck. He lit one of his own cigarettes and looked round this dimly lit room, and gave an anxious glance again at that dark young man, looking unpleasantly dead there on the floor. It was an odd situation for a respectable doctor from Chelsea! Anyone coming in—a policeman, for instance—would think a murder had been committed. The overturned tables, that broken lily, the scattered cigarettes, would heighten the effect. It was all too melodramatic to please Dr. John Jevons, who was interested in the minds of his patients.

He was annoyed at having been forced into physical violence, and he tidied things up somewhat and then opened the drawers of that cabinet to the right of the fireplace. He felt unpleasantly like a burglar doing a dirty job. It would be awkward if anyone came in. But he wanted to do a good turn to Lady Ide who was Cynthia's mother.

There were her letters, tied up in blue silk, and clearly inscribed in a fine handwriting—*Letters from Lady Ide*. There were other packets with other names on them. Women's names. Well, he wouldn't take the other packets, though for a moment he was tempted to burn them on that fire which made this room too warm. Those silly women might be grateful to him. . . .

He put Lady Ide's letters in his breast pocket. She would be glad to get rid of them on some fire of her own. There was something else that belonged to her. He came across it in a little drawer above the inkpot. It was a pearl necklace, which he took out and held in his hand for a moment—a long string of pearls which glowed in that dim rose-coloured light. They had cost Sir Francis "a hell

of a lot of money." Well—Dr. Jevons slipped them into the side pocket of his coat.

That boy was getting back to consciousness. He moaned feebly and flung his right arm across his forehead.

"Feeling better?" asked John.

It was a quarter of an hour later when the boy felt well enough to stagger up and then fall limply into one of his chairs.

"Oh, Christ!" he moaned, holding his head with both hands.

"Sorry," said John. "I didn't want to hurt you."

A stream of filthy oaths came from the boy's lips, but John ignored them and felt his pulse. Of course, he would feel a wreck for a day or two.

"I've taken Lady Ide's letters," said John. "I have also put those pearls in my pocket. You'll be safer without them. The police would trace them to you if you tried to sell them, and they're not yours, you know."

Benito was too sorry for himself to worry about the pearls or the letters. He moaned again, as though his head were splitting.

John drew a chair close to him and talked quietly for a few minutes in a friendly way. It was on the subject of dope. He strongly advised Benito to break himself of that habit. It would ruin his body and brain. And it wasn't worth it really. Far better to keep himself fit. If he would care to come round to Walpole Street—there was a brass plate on the door—John would do his level best to cure him of that craving.

"I'd like to help you," said John. "I believe I could, if you'd put yourself in my hands for a bit. I'm not blaming you, you know. One drifts into these habits unintentionally, or to relieve the strain of life. I dare say you've had a rough time. That night life—all that dancing—interminable jazz—it must get on a fellow's nerves."

"Oh, go to hell!" said Benito Birziska.

John went back to Walpole Street, where Eric Pardoe had dropped in to supper, looking pleased with himself. Janet was toasting some cheese for him and they were laughing together over some jest of their own. It was pleasant to get home after

an evening of melodrama. Surely that sort of thing didn't happen to a respectable doctor in Chelsea! And yet there were those letters in his breast pocket, and a string of pearls which he put into his desk before lighting his first pipe since breakfast. He hoped to goodness he hadn't been poisoned by that boy's snake bite.

XLVI

JOHN returned Lady Ide's letters and those pearls on his next visit to her, and she could hardly believe her eyes at the sight of them. The terror that had been haunting her passed like a dark nightmare, and her gratitude to the doctor who had done this thing for her was almost painful. She wept, and kissed his hand, and even went down on her knees before him, until he dragged her up and begged her to restrain herself.

The pearls did not seem to interest her much. It was those letters which had terrified her. She took them now with her face turned away from them, as though she could not bear to look at them, and her ivory skin, delicately enamelled, flushed crimson with some remembered shame. She went over to the fireplace and flung them into the heart of the flames there, and kicked them with the pointed toe of her slipper so that they should burn more fiercely. It was only when they had been turned to black charcoal and white ash that she gave a long-drawn sigh of relief, as though a burden had been lifted from her heart so that she could breathe freely again.

"I must have been mad," she said. "That dreadful boy! . . . He pretended he loved me—an old woman like me!—and I believed him, like a little servant-maid who wants to be loved. The things I wrote were—unbelievable! I'm horrified when I think of them."

She put her hands over her eyes to blot them out, and then sank back on to her sofa with her face down on one of the cushions.

"Doctor," she said presently, "what makes us go mad like that? Why should I be tempted at my age, after playing straight all my life before—even when I was a young long-legged thing with a crowd of men after me?"

"It's the lure of youth," said John. "We hate to grow old. It's the desperate urge of one's ego to be young and vital before the flame dies down. Isn't that so?"

He spoke with a smiling pity, knowing that one day it might happen to himself. It was happening now, in a way. He was thirty-six now, and something warned him that he was letting youth slip by without the satisfactions of life. He could understand this middle-aged woman hating the thought of old age creeping near, fascinated by that young scoundrel who had lied to her. It was frightful, but surely pitiable. Life was like that, unless one kept a careful watch on oneself and lived under some spiritual law stronger than one's unconscious impulses. That was why he was all in favour of religion. Without faith in some higher law it was impossible to master those demons in the underworld of the intelligence, those disordered cravings which crept up to the unguarded mind, those fantasies of the subconscious. He himself was a man without certain faith, except in beauty and pity and charity, but he envied those who had a creed so sure that they could not betray it without self-violence. They had developed a second nature higher than their natural instincts, and yet justified by intellectual consent. He had come across people like that. There was a young Catholic doctor he knew, wonderfully strict in principle yet tolerant to others. He had himself in perfect control. Some of these intellectual women he met were spiritual and well poised. But they were rare in his experience. Most of his patients had no faith and no philosophy. They had broken with creeds too narrow for their ideas of liberty and truth. They had nothing to replace those old laws of the spirit except the desire to have a good time while there was a chance to get it, and to push back old age with its final renunciation of joy and self-indulgence. They were determined to keep fit and attractive with the aid of beauty specialists and quack medicines. Perhaps that was at the bottom of this cult of health which was being carried too far as an obsession of the modern mind. The fear of death, the hatred of old age, the disbelief in another life, the desire for enjoyment, created these Lady Ides who looked as young as their daughters and kept dancing. In many ways it was good for the world's physical health—better than all the doctors—and yet it had a dangerous and tragic side to it. Time crept on. Death came. One had to get reconciled. . . .

Lady Ide confirmed these ideas that came to him. She confessed to the truth of his theory.

"I've been a wicked fool!" she cried. "I couldn't keep Dulcie Devereux out of my head—as I was twenty years ago, Doctor! I was jealous even of my poor darling Cynthia. 'Like sisters,' said my silly flatterers, pretending not to see the crow's feet which I kept dabbing back. And then that wretched boy came along and made love to me, and said I was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, and got me all excited with his nastiness."

She laughed, for the first time since his visits.

"I've had a dreadful scare, Doctor! . . . And I still feel bad about it. . . . Rotten, to tell the honest truth."

She cajoled him, with her head on one side, in something like her old style.

"You won't knock me off that stuff altogether, Doctor, will you? You won't be as cruel as that? It can't be good to knock it off all at once."

"It will kill you if you go on with it," said John. "You don't want to die just yet, I suppose?"

That frightened her, as he meant it to do. He saw the fear creep into her eyes again.

"Oh, don't say that!" she cried.

"I'll send you round some medicine," said John. "It may help you. I want to make you look yourself again in time for your daughter's wedding. All the Press photographers—*The Sketch* and *The Tatler*—will want to get pictures of you."

It appealed to her vanity—incurable, inexhaustible. Ill as she was, the thought of having her photographs in the paper again was like a tonic to her.

"You're a dear good man," she told him. "I don't know how I'm ever going to thank you. I'll try and pull myself together—honour bright!—now those awful letters are off my mind at last."

She took his hand and fondled it.

"Nice doctor!" she said. "Such funny eyebrows!"

She was getting better, he thought.

XLVII

IT was three days before Cynthia's marriage when Janet reminded her brother that he had not yet sent a gift to the bride. It would be nice of him, she thought, if he would send her one of his sketches. Cynthia would appreciate it tremendously.

"Good heavens, no!" said John. "She will have everything that money can buy. I see the papers are making a great fuss about it all. They're giving columns of nonsense about the bridesmaids and the bridal dress, and the waggon loads of wedding gifts. All that sort of thing seems a mistake with over a million unemployed."

Janet didn't press the point. But she kissed her brother on the back of the head before leaving for her hat shop. And he wished he wouldn't be so sympathetic when there was any talk about Cynthia. It made him feel self-conscious and uncomfortable. He couldn't think how Janet had guessed that he had been smitten—for a week or two—by that pretty patient of his. He must have given himself away rather hopelessly; or else she had imagined that he had been more emotional than he really was. Women were like that. One couldn't look at a girl with admiring eyes without their building up fairy-tales. Of course, if he had been a rich man, and not a doctor, and if Cynthia Ide had been disengaged he might have thought more about it. She allured him, certainly. He couldn't deny that he still thought her the most exquisite type of modern girl he had happened to come across. He liked her tall slim figure, and that straw-coloured hair of hers, and the poise of her head, and the hint of mirth in her eyes, and her frankness of speech. There was something more in it even than that. There was a subtle call to him from her mind, some mystical appeal, hard to explain. If he had been a romantic type of man instead of a hard-headed doctor he might have believed that there was some touch of fate in that thrill which came to him in her presence—destiny, and that sort of thing. She became fused with his ideas of beauty and youth.

When he thought of beauty he thought of this girl, even if it were a sunset over London chimney-pots, or a flower bed in Kensington Gardens, or a golden haze down Knightsbridge. Queer that! Doubtless there was some physical appeal about her. These things are all mixed up. The body and the spirit have no sharp division. Men turned their heads when she passed. Even Janet's errand boy grinned at her. Several men were desperately in love with her. And now she was going to marry Basil Hyde and he hoped she would be happy, though she seemed to have some doubts on the subject and was frightened of marriage. There was nothing he could do about it. It was better not to think of her like this. Better read the third leader in *The Times*. . . .

He was reading the third leader, not very attentively, when the front door bell rang. It rang twice before Mrs. Meggs condescended to answer it. He heard her showing someone into the consulting room and then her wheezy breath outside his own door.

"A young woman to see you, sir."

"Right," said John. "She can wait a moment."

He finished that third leader in *The Times*. It was quite amusing. He wondered who the young woman might be. It was only now and then that stray patients called on him. Mostly they sent for him having heard his name from some friend he had treated. He knocked his pipe out against the fireplace, placed it with other favourites on the mantelpiece and went into his consulting room.

It was Phyllis Dix who wanted to see him. She was in her neat frock, dark blue, in which he had seen her hurrying off to Gosport's in the Brompton Road, and her little 'cloche' hat—it was in the year of 'cloche' hats—was pulled down nearly as far as her eyes showing only a wisp of her fair hair—the colour of Cynthia's, almost. She was pulling off a pair of gloves nervously as he entered and she looked worried, he thought.

"Good morning, Miss Phyllis. What can I do for you?"

He tried to reassure her, and put her at her ease. He was surprised at her nervousness. Generally when he had passed a few words with her in King's Road she had been wonderfully self-assured, and once, he remembered, she had told him to mind his own business, though she had apologised for that at their next meeting. Well, he didn't have any grudge against her because of

that. He liked her, as he liked all those thousands of young girls in short frocks and silk stockings who made a laughing pageant in the streets of London. He had only been anxious about her, as sometimes he was anxious about the others, because life isn't so easy as some of them think, and they take risks which are rather dangerous, now and then. "Please cross here." Some of them didn't mind the warning, and got caught in the traffic or other forms of death-trap. He hoped to goodness——

"Good morning, Doctor . . . I feel a bit—well—queer, as a matter of fact."

She laughed and then gave a little gulp as though that laughter were just bravado.

"Queer, eh? That's annoying. Too queer to go to Gosport's to-day?"

"Well, mother thinks I've gone," said Phyllis. "I don't want mother to know I've been here. Nor anyone else, neither."

"No reason why anyone should know, unless I have to send you to bed."

Phyllis Dix became fussed at that suggestion, and her face flushed, as she pulled at her gloves as though she would tear them.

"Oh, I shan't go to bed! . . . I don't want mother to get worried . . . I don't expect it's anything really. . . . It's just this silly sickness. . . . I thought I'd ask you."

"Tell me," said John.

His face became grave, and a look of alarm came into his eyes, though he tried to hide it, and sat down beside this girl who was on the window-seat with her back to the light.

It was distressing what she told him in answer to his questions. It was what he had been afraid of now and then. He had warned her, and she had told him to mind his own business. She was quite able to look after herself she had told him, and he almost believed it. But she hadn't been able to look after herself. It had all seemed a fairy-tale and she had gone like Cinderella to the ball—that fancy ball and the Carlton and other places—but she hadn't left at the stroke of twelve, and the fairy prince had been a villain.

"My poor child," said John. "I'm desperately sorry."

He felt more than desperately sorry. He felt a real anguish at

this child's terror and despair. She was like a bird caught in a trap and tearing her wings to escape.

"But it needn't happen, need it?" she kept asking. "Oh, doctor, say it needn't happen!"

He had to tell her the truth. All he could try to do was to give her courage to go through with it. Her mother would help her, he said. She had better tell her mother who would understand and be kind to her. He was certain of that. No one would be hard on her.

"No," cried Phyllis. "I daren't tell mother. Oh, I daren't!"

She flung herself across his body weeping, with a noise that brought Mrs. Meggs upstairs to listen outside the door. She tore her clothes and screamed until he held her hands and hushed her down. She spoilt the prettiness of her face by smudging it with tears and letting agony twist her lips and put its blackness beneath her eyes.

John kept her there as long as she was hysterical like that. It was nearly lunch-time before she was in any state to leave the house. All that time he talked to her, tried to comfort her, did his best to make light of the thing that was inevitable. When the little baby came she would love it for its own sake. It would be something to live for. She would be able to work for it. Every one would be kind to her. People weren't cruel now in cases like this. They were so sorry and they tried to help. But she would have to be brave. He was quite certain she had a lot of pluck. He had thought that the first time he had seen her. He could not get even the ghost of a smile out of her when he reminded her of those photographs of herself as Columbine.

"Poor little Columbine!" he said. "You ought really to tidy yourself up a bit."

At last he was able to put her into a taxi and send her off to Gosport's with the fare paid. She wouldn't go home like that.

When he helped her into the cab she sat back with her head drooping—like a wounded bird, he thought, still terrified.

"I shan't tell mother," she said again. "Promise you won't tell, Doctor!"

"Not a soul," he promised. "Good-bye, my dear. Be brave, won't you?"

She gave just a ghost of a smile and then put her hands up to her face and wept again.

John watched the taxi turn the corner of Walpole Street and then went into his house and filled that pipe which he had placed on the mantelpiece of the breakfast-room. But he didn't smoke it, just then. He leaned with both arms on the mantelpiece and groaned. He was filled with pity and rage. . . . Sir Francis Ide—Cynthia's father—he would like to smash his face. It was frightful. If he weren't a doctor he would go round and do a physical injury to that florid-faced blackguard. Not that that would do any good except to liberate his own rage. It would be "cave-man stuff"—and out of date. . . . This child had broken some of his faith in her age and type. He had had an idea that they were too sensible to be caught in a trap like that, too wise and self-confident—too careful anyhow. There was nothing they didn't know—but knowledge hadn't saved Phyllis Dix from this misfortune. People wouldn't be cruel, he had told her. They would be kind and try to help, he had said, in sincerity. But life would be hard on her. Society would be cruel. She would lose her job at Gosport's presently. That child of hers would enter the world with a heavy handicap however pitiful her family might be. Only Sir Francis Ide would go scot free. . . .

How could one deal with this sort of thing? The whole mentality of modern life was permeated with this temptation of sex, from which there was no escape except by sacrifice and self-denial. The old reticence was gone, the old barriers of prudery had broken down, the old safeguards of girlhood had been smashed. It was impossible to restore them in a world where women competed on level terms with men, and were utterly candid about the facts of life, demanding equal knowledge as well as equal rights. Well, he agreed with that. But passion hadn't departed with the old conventions. There were ravening wolves about for little Red Riding Hoods. These children—some of them—took risks which led to tragedy when they were only out for fun.

That poor little Phyllis! That poor, pretty bird! It was very rough on her. It was horrible to think of all that was coming to her in humiliation and misery. Perhaps her mother wouldn't be pitiful. Certainly Gosport's would give her "the sack." And Sir

Francis Ide whose daughter was going to be married at St. Margaret's, Westminster—what was he going to do about it?

“Christ Jesus!” said Doctor Jevons before he lit his pipe, and those words were not an oath but something like a prayer from the soul of a man who had no magic in his medicine strong enough to deal with this problem of passion.

Outside the window in Walpole Street a piano organ was playing, “Baby, I want to be loved.”

XLVIII

JANET'S boy came over to dinner that evening looking almost too handsome in his dinner jacket and evening kit, with a black tie of the butterfly shape. Nina Ziborova came in afterwards for coffee, and that humorous couple, Betty Truslove and Birdie Thistledown, with whom John was very friendly now, also made an unexpected appearance and announced in a casual way in the course of conversation that they were going to get married during a fortnight's holiday from the Rag.

"It may save a bit on housekeeping bills," said Betty, as though that were the main idea. She thought also that by marrying a sub-editor she would have a strangle-hold over him and could give him hell if her stuff were cut to pieces or put on the spike.

Thistledown thought he might gain from matrimony by having someone to poach his breakfast eggs. Besides, marriage, he understood, was a biological necessity.

"No, none of that, Birdie!" said his lady, warning him off that kind of talk. "Janet doesn't approve of biological chit-chat between the sexes."

"Oh, you can't shock me!" protested Janet. "I'm hardened by young women like you. Besides, I serve in a shop with Nina Ziborova."

That remark caused a Russian lady to throw a silk cushion across the room.

"How abominable a slander!" she cried. "Never do I say anything which might not be overheard by modest virgins and—how shall I say?—a lady colonel of the Salvation Army!"

Janet rescued the cushion and laughed at this explosive protest.

"Why, dear Nina, only yesterday an old lady from South Kensington nearly fainted in the shop when she heard you describing the immorality of Bolshevik Russia. It was certainly alarming, my dear. Your language is rather indelicate sometimes."

"How can one be delicate when one talks about devils?" asked Nina, and that simple question was greeted with loud laughter from Birdie Thistledown and Betty Truslove, while Eric Pardoe smiled at the Russian lady who had startled the waiters at the Carlton one evening by a reference to her chemise. He had been peeved at first by the arrival of these visitors, desiring, no doubt, the undivided attention of Janet, but his good humour was restored by Betty's praise of his performance in "The Passions of Pamela."

"Birdie was quite jealous of my adulation," she told him. "I can't think how you manage to look so beautiful. Don't you find it rather a strain sometimes? I mean, when you walk about the streets and so on."

She was pulling his leg a little, and he was aware of it but rather liked it.

"It's the camera that does the trick," he explained. "Some of these film beauties are frightening when you see them in the sunlight."

John grinned at him. Of course the boy was quite aware of his own good looks, but was not too conceited about them. And he had improved in his manners and general tone. He had lost that look of self-pity and morbid pessimism. He did not stutter any more and had a self-assurance, as though he had got right with life. It was astonishing to think that not many months ago he had been very near the edge of the dark pit. Janet had had something to do with it. She had been a strengthening influence. Her strong character had pulled him out of that Slough of Despond. She had laughed him out of his self-pity and taken the poison out of his soul by her devotion to him. Luck had helped, too. It was distressing, thought John, how luck entered into life, unfairly sometimes, giving chances to some people which were utterly denied to others. If Cynthia hadn't asked for that chit from her blackguardly father, Eric might have walked the streets of London till his boots wore out, without getting a job in a film studio. He had simply walked through all his rivals by that note in his pocket. Of course, his talent had helped. If he had been hopeless as an actor, even his good looks wouldn't have done the trick. But luck gives a man his chance. Without the magic touch of it talent may go begging. Now he was playing up well, and he was not ungrateful to the friends who had helped him.

It was pleasant to see his gratitude to Janet, his respect for her, his almost humble devotion. Now and again their eyes met with smiling and secret messages, while Betty and her colleague kept the conversation going and while Nina rattled on vivaciously. Once, when Janet crossed the room to pull the window curtains—it was an evening in July and the light lingered late—she put her fingers through his hair as he sat on a footstool with his hands clasped round his knees, and he caught her hand and pulled it down to his lips. Another time he changed his position and sat on the hearthrug at her feet, until Nina begged for a little music and Janet moved to the piano. Afterwards Eric came over and offered his tobacco pouch to John.

“Your brand,” he remarked.

“Thanks,” said John. “One gets to like it.”

He had an idea that the boy wanted to get something off his chest, because he sat down next to John, puffing at his own pipe, with a deliberate disregard for the other visitors.

“Aren’t you going to knock off work for a bit?” he asked presently. “You must be getting fagged, I imagine.”

John was surprised by this consideration for his health. It was the first time Eric had shown such interest in his well-being.

“Not much chance of a holiday,” he answered. “I can’t afford to neglect my practice.”

“Hard luck!”

Eric was silent for a few minutes, while Nina sang one of her Russian songs. Then he swung round to John and spoke in a confidential voice.

“Would you have any objection to Janet taking a holiday? I mean, it’s pretty good weather for a honeymoon, don’t you think?”

John pulled his pipe out of his mouth and regarded its bowl with a thoughtful smile. This young man seemed in a hurry to grab Janet, and a doctor in Walpole Street was going to feel very lonely without her. For the first time he realised that future loneliness. It would be unamusing to be left to the mercies of Mrs. Meggs, to come back from his rounds, as sometimes he had done lately, with no friendly soul to talk to about the incidents of the day.

Janet had been unobtrusive, but she had oiled the wheels so that everything seemed to run by clockwork. And she had been comradely in the best sense of the word. He would miss her most damnably if this boy went off with her.

"Excellent," he agreed, referring to the weather. "What is Janet's idea about it?"

Eric admitted that Janet didn't want to do things in a hurry. She had mentioned six months as a minimum. Why, the world might come to an end in six months! It was a most unholy length of time. Perhaps John might bring a little pressure to bear in a brotherly way.

"I'll have a talk with her," said John. "It's against my own interests, you know. I shall hate to lose her."

"By Jove, yes. I can understand that, though I'm bound to say I never thought of it in that light."

This loss to John seemed to break upon him as a revelation.

"I owe you a great deal—for everything," he said gratefully.

That ended their private conversation, because Janet took Eric by the hand and desired him to talk to Betty Truslove, who wanted a story from him about the life of movie actors. She could work up something for the Rag.

"And by the way," said Betty Truslove, "I'm doing Cynthia Ide's wedding on Wednesday. We're sending down a squad of photographers. It's going to be the wedding of the season. Tell me something about the bridesmaids, Janet."

Janet told what she knew about the bridesmaids, and seemed to know a good deal, as some of them were customers of hers.

"A bevy of beauties!" cried Nina with enthusiasm. "But that charming Cynthia will be the most exquisite of all. She is like some of our women on the Volga with golden hair and blue eyes. I knew a little Princess——"

"There is that relentless telephone," said Janet. "Poor old Jacko!"

John went to the telephone. There was a woman's voice speaking into the receiver.

"Is that Doctor Jevons?"

"Yes."

"This is Mrs. Dix speaking. . . . Oh, Doctor, you must come

round at once. . . . I'm terribly frightened about Phyllis. She's been taken bad somehow. . . . I'm terrified. . . ."

"I'll be round in two minutes," said John.

"Oh, Doctor, for God's sake be quick!"

The voice wailed through the telephone and then was silent while John held the receiver in his hand with a sense of apprehension.

That poor child Phyllis again. He hoped to goodness——

He put the instrument on its hook and strode out of the room while Nina was laughing at some joke of Birdie Thistledown. It was less than two minutes to Royal Avenue, for a doctor who did not trouble about his hat and coat and ran round from Walpole Street, colliding with a young man who had his arm round a girl's waist on this warm night in July, and not stopping to make apologies, so that the girl shouted after him in a shrill voice.

"Impudence! Can't you look where you're going?"

XLIX

DOCTOR JEVONS was let into that house in Royal Avenue by a frightened maid-servant. As he went upstairs he saw one of the lodgers standing at a door, listening. It was that little old lady who believed she lived in Eaton Square and called on friends who had been dead these fifty years. In her black silk dress, with a velvet band round her thin white hair, she stood there as though aware that something unusual was happening in the house.

"Did anyone call?" she asked. "I thought I heard someone call, my dear."

From her open door came a faint sound of music. Some ghostly orchestra was playing a tune out of *Il Trovatore* to a loud speaker that wasn't very loud.

Yes, someone was calling upstairs—calling to God for pity and mercy. It was Mrs. Dix, crying out in a room where her daughter lay on her bed with her fair hair tumbled about the pillow and her breast bare where she had torn her clothes in agony with hands that now lay still.

John went to the bed and leaned over the body of that child who had come to see him in the morning. He put his hand over her heart and felt no beat. He listened and heard no breath. He took up one of the hands and it fell lifeless to the bed again. He was busy about her while her mother moaned with an apron over her head. On the washstand near the bed was a glass with some liquid in it, and he smelt it and put the glass down again carefully.

"Oh, Doctor, why does she lie so quiet now?"

He had to tell her, and steeled himself to the wild screams of a mother who would not believe him. And it was difficult to believe that this pretty girl who had walked down King's Road, Chelsea, so often as though the world belonged to her, should be lying there like a dead bird with glazed eyes. It was difficult to

believe in any supernatural goodness in life which allowed, or did not prevent this thing . . . this sacrifice of beauty and youth to the Moloch of cruelty. Poor little Phyllis! Poor Columbine! Her photographs in that dancing dress which had lain over her chair one morning were on the mantelpiece. In one of them she was kissing her hands to life. The *Daily Mirror* had picked her out for her prettiness.

Against the clock—a cheap thing which ticked loudly—was a letter addressed in a big childish handwriting. It was to Sir Francis Ide, and John stared at it with hard eyes. That man had killed her. Cynthia's father! Cynthia's father! Well, he mustn't touch that letter. There would have to be an inquest. They would want to read it. He would have to send for the police. . . .

Before he sent for the police he listened to the wailings of that tragic mother. She had been hard on Phyllis, she cried. God pity her, but she had spoken hard words to the child. It was when she had come home early from Gosport's and confessed how bad she felt, and the reason of it. The disgrace that was coming to them was more than a mother could bear when she first heard it, she being respectable all her life and a church-going woman. To think of Phyllis going wrong was past belief, and she had never doubted that Sir Francis was a real gentleman and just fond of the girl. Now she would like to tear his eyes out. Oh, Jesus! . . . Her laughing Phyllis! Her pretty baby! It could not be true.

She fell down beside the bed where Phyllis lay still, and for a moment or two this doctor from Walpole Street had no pity for her. She had been hard and cruel to a girl desperately in need of kindness. It was through her vanity that this child had not been better guarded from the dangers of life. It had pleased her to know that her daughter had made friends with a "real gentleman." She had smiled and nodded when Sir Francis Ide had come to tea, with his eyes on Phyllis all the time. She must have known what he was after. And then she had talked about the shame that was coming to her, and had helped to make this thing happen by harsh words.

For a few moments John had no compassion in his heart, but only anger. And then suddenly he was filled with pity. To these people with their narrow little lives the visits of a man like Sir

Francis Ide in his big car was like a fairy-tale. She had been flustered by his attentions to Phyllis. She had been weak, and vain, and foolish, and Phyllis had twisted her round her little finger, no doubt, scoffing at her fears, playing on her vanity, promising that she knew how to look after herself, going off to her "gentleman friend" while this mother of hers washed up for her lodgers in the basement scullery and cooked up supper for Mr. Birdie Thistledown who came back late from work, and kept an eye on the little old lady who was apt to slip out of the house and lose herself in London. There could be no blame. Only pity. She was the mother of that dead child. He put his arm about her and helped her to stagger up, and led her out of the room, and downstairs past the little old lady who had come up one flight and stood there listening, and asked again, "Did I hear anyone call, my dear? Is there anything the matter?"

It was then that young Thistledown came back, whistling "Poor little Rich Girl" as he opened the front door with his latchkey.

John went to meet him in the hall.

"Hullo!" cried young Thistledown cheerily. "You here? Somebody unwell?"

"Somebody dead," said John. "Poor Phyllis. I want you to fetch a policeman, if you don't mind."

Birdie Thistledown staggered back against the hat-stand and thrust a hand through his red hair.

"Great God! . . . Dead? . . . Murdered?"

"Suicide," said John. "I shall be up in her room when you bring the police."

He was up in Phyllis's room again when there was a heavy tramp upstairs. He was leaning over the dead girl, making her look more decent in death, when the door opened and a policeman came in. It was Police Constable Widgery, who stood there without a word, breathing hard, with a white face. He took off his helmet, showing that plastered hair with a quiff on his forehead.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," said John. "I was hoping it wouldn't be you."

And a policeman who had been one of the heroes of a great war and had seen death close at hand in many fields of mud, put

the back of his hand across his eyes to blot out the sight of that pretty girl who lay dead on her little white bed.

"May God curse the man who brought her to this," he said harshly. "That swine . . . that dirty villain . . ."

"Pull yourself together," said John quietly. "There's a letter on the mantelpiece. . . . There'll have to be an inquest."

L

PERHAPS it was young Thistledown's journalistic instinct which put a paragraph headed "Suicide in Chelsea" in the morning paper on which he was a sub-editor. That journalistic instinct seems to be stronger than private grief or human compassion or the social code. But pretty Phyllis was only worth a paragraph of three lines, dead or alive, until later it was known that her suicide was linked up with the name of a well-known figure in public life. It may have been through that paragraph—before his name had even been mentioned—that Sir Francis Ide came to know what had happened; or his first anxiety may have been caused by a summons to an inquest. Dr. Jevons, who brooded over this affair after a visit from that gentleman, imagined that he had read the newspaper paragraph. Perhaps he had been sitting at breakfast, with Cynthia on the other side of the table, in her dressing-gown over those white silk pyjamas with scarlet dragons, surrounded by wedding presents which came pouring in by every post. John imagined the scene in the big raw-red house in Cadogan Square where that florid-faced man sat behind his morning paper, glancing at the financial news or saying, "I see they've got a picture of your wedding gown, my dear," and other casual remarks from any father to any daughter, until by some chance his eyes fell upon that paragraph, "Suicide in Chelsea," with the name of Phyllis Dix in three small lines of print under a column about dog-racing at Olympia. Perhaps he choked over his morning coffee, or became ashen grey behind that newspaper.

This imaginary picture flashed into John's mind at the time of his visit, and lingered afterwards. It was hardly ten o'clock in the morning before he came round to Walpole Street, on foot, and sent in his card, and stood in John's consulting-room with a silk hat in his hand and an umbrella, neatly rolled, hung over his arm. The

portrait of an English gentleman—slightly spoilt by an anxious look and heavily puffed eyes.

He began quietly enough.

"Oh, Doctor, I understand you attended a young woman named Phyllis Dix. In Royal Avenue."

John said "Yes," rather heavily.

"I'm distressed to hear she committed suicide last night."

"There'll be an inquest," said John, looking into his eyes until they shifted uneasily.

"I suppose that's inevitable?"

Sir Francis Ide stared out of the window for a moment or two, as though interested in the house opposite where a maid-servant was polishing the brass knocker. Then he turned his face, but not his eyes towards John again.

"I happened to know the poor girl. I took an interest in her, and this has been a very great shock to me. Beyond all words. But I'm particularly anxious that my name should not appear at all. . . . Particularly anxious. . . . I suppose there is no chance of that?"

John did not answer for a moment. A little pulse was beating in his forehead. Something was happening to his endocrine glands, as always happens when rage causes an increase of adrenal secretion, tensing up the nerve cells, strengthening the heart beat, speeding up the breathing. He was curiously conscious of this physiological action in the presence of Sir Francis Ide.

"Every chance," he answered sharply. "She left a letter addressed to you. It will be in the hands of the coroner."

It was then that Sir Francis Ide lost his composure and became excited.

"My God!" he cried. "My God!"

He paced up and down the room with a flushed face, suddenly unnerved at the thought of that letter.

"My name mustn't appear," he said presently. "It must be suppressed at all costs. I refuse to have that letter read out at the inquest. I shall be ruined socially if there's the slightest suggestion that I was at all concerned with that poor girl. I appeal to you, Doctor. You must say a word to the coroner."

"It's out of my hands," said John sternly. "I can do nothing."

You *are* concerned with that girl's death. You are the direct cause of it as much as if you had murdered her."

Sir Francis Ide staggered back for a moment, and his hand fumbled over his left side.

"Those are very strong words, Doctor," he said after a long silence. "Very unjustifiable words. I confess I—I behaved—foolishly—weakly—you know what human nature is! But the girl knew what she was doing. She was old enough to take care of herself. She was—well—not so innocent as she looked. How do I know that I was the only one? She must have had boys round her—a pretty girl like that and out for fun. I decline to admit——"

"The inquest will be held to-morrow," said John. "Kindly reserve what you have to say until then. And clear out of this consulting-room or—by God——"

He was going to say "I will kick you out." But something in the man's face, a broken look, a look of remorse and fear, and desperation, put a brake on his rage. And very curiously, as he remembered afterwards, some old words passed through his mind at that moment, as though spoken to him in that consulting-room, and as though he heard them by some clairaudience:

"He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone."

"Look here, Doctor," said Sir Francis Ide. "I know I'm a rotter—desperately weak—not a moralist. I've no excuses or self-defence, except this human nature of ours which never leaves one in peace. Not at any age, curse it! I'm forty-eight and a lonely man. My wife has gone her own way for years. That pretty little Phyllis seemed to bring romance into my life again. A little shop-girl, yes, but that's the kind of girl I used to know as a boy. She spoke my language—not like those damn society women who think I'm dirt. I felt happy with her." His voice broke, and his eyes moistened for a moment.

"You understand how a kind of madness gets hold of one at my age," he added after a pause. "I dare say you'd call it biological, or something like that. It seemed like the flame of youth again. A false summer! It's like the temptation of the devil."

"It is the temptation of the devil," said John. "Don't let's make any mistake about that."

Sir Francis Ide went to the window and stood there motionless, absorbed in the crisis he had to face.

Presently he turned round again, with darker lines under his eyes and an older look, as though those moments had been years.

"I don't care much for myself," he said. "It doesn't much matter as far as I am concerned. But I'd like to have this thing hushed up for my daughter's sake. She's going to be married the day after to-morrow. It will make a nasty kind of scandal for her wedding-day. If you could use your influence at all——?"

"I have none," said John. "I shall have to give evidence according to the law."

Sir Francis Ide sighed heavily, and then shrugged his shoulders with a harsh mirthless laugh.

"I must see what I can do with the Press."

Presently he picked up his silk hat and hung his umbrella on his arm again.

"Thanks," he said. "Sorry to have troubled you."

He nodded and left the room, and John heard him close the front door with a slight bang.

And after the door had closed, this doctor in Walpole Street groaned and leaned with his elbows on his mantelshelf staring at a cigarette burn which he had made months ago, but not seeing it. The beast in the underworld of the human mind! How was civilisation going to deal with that? Or psychotherapy? Passion after all was natural and instinctive. It was terrific in its demands. It was no good pretending that it was easy of control, kept in check by a few moral platitudes. Naturally man was polygamous, and love nowadays in the Western World was linked up in a psychical way with all the romantic and artistic aspects of life. It was the one way to ecstasy in a machine-driven age. This man Ide had been lured by romance! That poor little shop girl had rekindled the flame of life in him. She had broken his sense of loneliness and futility. She was Beauty calling, and the dream of youth again. And the conventional codes of morality were breaking down. All those novels which were read by so many women were smashing the old reticence about human passion. Betty Truslove and her kind discussed love with the frankness of French

realists. Freud and Marie Stopes were read in the suburbs. Something had happened in England since the war.

It was the unveiling of things that had been hidden; the bringing into the light of that passionate urge which had always existed but was never talked about in Victorian England. In a way that was good. Repressed instincts in the subconscious mind had caused a multitude of agonies in English homes. But no amount of frankness killed passion itself. Every day as a doctor he came across it as the origin of social distresses and mental maladies. Now this tragedy forced the problem on his mind again, involved him in its ghastly results. It was impossible to deny the Freudian emphasis on sex as the most dominant, the most desperate, the most subtle cause of unconscious impulses; and yet, unless they were controlled and ordered, society would be degraded into animalism. Surely civilisation could not hark back to pagan passion without a frightful breakdown? In the old days religion, with its tremendous claim to spiritual authority, its promises and terrors, its mysticism and ecstasy, had a more than natural control over human passion to those who believed. Even the Victorians, who were ceasing to believe, maintained the moral code which belonged to the earlier faith—apart from their hypocrisy. But now people were ceasing to believe in the code itself. They were scoffing at it. The only things left were the social disadvantages and the public penalties still inflicted upon those who violated a social convention without faith behind it. People were expected to be moral without intellectual consent to morality. It wouldn't work. It was ceasing to work. Could psychotherapy take the place of the old religious checks and balances? How could one build up a system of mind-healing which left out the spirit and the soul? How could one replace the ecstasy of human passion without some supernatural passion, some terrific mystical faith, which would reconcile ordinary mortals to self-sacrifice and the torture of asceticism—or self-control, which amounted to that?

That man Ide! He was a mass of nervous energy, uncontrolled by any spiritual or moral law, except fear of social shame. His subconscious mind was a jungle of primitive instincts. He was the blonde beast of the uncleared forest, walking about in modern civilisation with a silk hat and a rolled umbrella. He was the

natural man who had cut loose from a code in which he no longer believed. He was the man without law, which had lost its authority. He was the "cave-man" of the cinema tormented by all the lures of passion which called to him from every shop window and from the bright eyes of little houris in short frocks and silk stockings. Somehow or other the world would have to be saved by some spiritual passion stronger than human instincts, or civilisation would go to pieces again, as often before, in moral degradation.

As once before this doctor in Walpole Street spoke some words aloud.

"Physician, heal thyself!"

He was conscious of the lurking beast in his own underworld, and of empty chambers of faith in the hidden city of his mind. Perhaps the only faith he had was a belief in a spiritual reality beyond the illusion of life, and a dedication to service, and a sense of pity. He had it in his heart to pity Sir Francis Ide, in spite of all his loathing.

JOHN listened to the evidence at the inquest and gave his own for what it was worth. All the time in that hot court, pervaded with the faint sharp smell of some disinfectant which had washed down its walls, he had the idea that it was not only an enquiry into the death of Phyllis Dix but into the private life of London which produced such tragedies—into the moral code of modern civilisation. At least that idea was a vague undertone of thought in his mind as he watched the coroner bending over his notes with his pince-nez askew on the bridge of his nose, and as he glanced now and then at the witnesses—Police Constable Widgery and Sir Francis Ide and Mrs. Dix—and at other people at the court. At the reporters' table was Betty Truslove sharpening her pencil. At the back of the court was a row of policemen without their helmets, probably giving evidence in other inquests which would follow this. Sir Francis Ide sat with his solicitor staring into his silk hat and liberating his nervous tension by crossing and uncrossing his legs repeatedly.

That little girl who lay in the mortuary out there was the product of the cinema, the sentimental novel, the picture papers and all the fashion shops which tease the vanity of women. As an only daughter she had been petted and admired and humoured in her wilfulness. The mother had begun by flattering her and then had been afraid of her.

"None of the old discipline," thought John. "These girls insist on going their own way. They laugh at restraints. They ignore experience as though the world had just begun. That's the devil of it. Experience can't be handed down. The younger generation begins all over again, like young Adams and Eves. . . ."

Mrs. Dix broke down in the witness box and wept hysterically.

"Take your time, Mrs. Dix," said the coroner. "I don't

want to distress you. You say your daughter was of a happy disposition. . . .”

John let his eyes rove for a moment towards Sir Francis Ide. That witness looked at Mrs. Dix for a moment with heavy brooding eyes and then passed his sleeve over the nap of his felt hat in an automatic way. Probably he felt remorseful for that woman's agony. And yet stronger than all pity and remorse was that passion in him which had led to this. He too was a product of his time. He hadn't the will-power to master his unconscious impulses, or he had let himself slide. Those smoke-room stories, the humour of his crowd, the guffaws of laughter which greeted the light morality of musical comedies and bedroom farces made a joke of a little affair with a pretty shop-girl. "A little bit of fluff," and why not? "Everybody's doing it." A man must have his "night out" now and then.

This doctor who had given evidence remembered his own roars of laughter at that kind of thing when he was a medical student. It was only somewhat later when he had come up against the realities of life as it streams into the London Hospital that he had understood the consequences of easy-going love, in disease and vice and all kinds of tragedy. It had come to him sharply as a revelation one night in the wards where a girl was dying horribly. . . . It wasn't really humorous, the immorality of a great city.

What was that the coroner was reading? He read it dryly as though it were an extract from a Blue Book instead of the last letter of Phyllis Dix which she had put on the mantelpiece in front of that cheap clock.

She did not blame Sir Francis much. She thanked him for the presents he had given her and the good time. It would have been all right, she wrote, if she hadn't been such a wicked little fool. Of course, all the time she had known he wasn't wasting his money on her for nothing. She had always known that he felt funny about her. She had seen it in his eyes the first time he had talked to her over the counter at Gosport's. But she did blame him a little for tempting her so much with pretty things. How could she refuse? Besides, he was a married man with a beautiful daughter and it made her feel horrible now. And she had never really known what it all

meant. Just a few kisses, she had thought—a peck or two—and no harm done. Now she knew. She had messed up her whole life and she couldn't face it. They would give her the sack at Gosport's, and the girls would whisper about her, and the young men would nudge each other and be disgusting. Her mother had made a frightful scene and called her dreadful names. Perhaps she deserved them. Anyhow, there was no more fun in life. She was fed up with it. She felt awful and she was terribly depressed. She hated herself. She was afraid of everybody when they found out. She simply couldn't stick it.

"Oh, my dear Sir," she wrote, "I wish you and I was dining at one of those smart restaurants to-night like we did when I thought there was no harm in it. I expect you'll be taking another girl there, poor little wretch, and I only hope she'll have more sense than I did not to know that one can't have a gentleman friend, without getting into trouble. So now I'll say good-bye because I feel frightful and by the time you get this I shan't be here any more.

Your unhappy little friend,

PHYLLIS DIX."

"P.S. I would like to be buried with that wrist-watch you gave me."

John listened to that letter which aroused a titter of laughter among some shabby women at the back of the court. A titter of laughter and a man's guffaw. Good God! Where was the joke? The most hardened ruffian might shed tears over such a letter and not be ashamed. Its simplicity, its pathos, its despair, written by a girl who had gone dancing into the adventure of life—Columbine—might make the angels weep if there happened to be any who cared about human tragedy. But there were women who found it funny. John scowled at them murderously, under his twisted eyebrows.

Sir Francis Ide was called upon by the coroner and there was a stir in court among the reporters and the public. Oh, a good story for Betty Truslove and those newspapers! They would see excellent copy in it. It would be read next morning by hundreds of thousands of girls, not quite as pretty as Phyllis Dix, in the rush hour on the

way to work. Well, it might be a warning to them. Probably their verdict would be "Little fool! Didn't she know how to take care of herself?" . . . No, that was too bitter, thought John. Some of them would be pitiful, just for a moment before turning to the fashion page.

Sir Francis Ide was taking the oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. His hand trembled slightly as he held the book and his face was deeply flushed. The coroner would give him a bad time. . . .

Well, there was no more need for Dr. Jevons to wait in court, and it wasn't going to be pleasant listening to Sir Francis Ide trying to evade awkward questions.

The coroner whispered down from his desk.

"I shan't need you any more, Doctor."

John went out of the court and its stifling heat, with a bad headache and a sense of depression. One face in court remained in his mind as he walked back to Walpole Street where his lunch would be ready and Janet waiting. It was the face of Police Constable Widgery without his helmet, staring at Sir Francis Ide with an intensity of hatred and contempt which might have withered the man in the witness box had he been aware of it.

That afternoon when John went round to one of his patients his eyes caught a newspaper placard at the corner of Sloane Street.

Shop-girl's suicide.

Dramatic evidence.

Betty Truslove and her colleague had written their story. This afternoon Betty would be on another job—all in the day's work. Sir Francis Ide had failed to square the Press on the eve of his daughter's wedding.

The doctor from Walpole Street groaned aloud, startling a girl waiting for a bus. She may have thought he had indigestion, or a touch of sun on this August day with a shimmering heat in the street and a smell of tar in the roads.

Cynthia Ide was another victim of the tragedy. What a horrible revelation of home life on the eve of her marriage! The wedding guests would be whispering about Phyllis Dix as the bride walked

up the aisle on her father's arm. And it was not very pleasant for Basil Hyde and his relatives.

There were other skeletons in the cupboards of that red house in Cadogan Square, but this cupboard was wide open, and the stench came out of it.

LII

THAT afternoon John had his usual round of patients—and had to put that inquest out of his mind, to concentrate upon the immediate problems of his daily job. There was a child with measles in Wellington Square and another with mumps in Tite Street. A lady in Sloane Court had been knocked over by a taxi and was suffering from shock. In Tryon Street with its rows of cottages left as a relic of the Bill Sikes era between blocks of modern buildings a girl was in the last stage of tuberculosis. Then there was the wife of a chimney-sweep who suffered periodically from alcoholic poisoning and a retired colonel in Wilbraham Place who was crippled by arthritis, and a charming actress in Ormonde Court who had lately been on tour and picked up typhoid in theatrical lodgings. It was the routine stuff of a general practitioner but needing attention, sympathy and interest. John marvelled sometimes at the way in which he could switch his mind so rapidly to each case, adapting his manner and method to the personality with whom he had to deal.

“I must be a bit of a humbug,” he thought. “It’s like being an actor, in a way, posing as an optimist when I feel down in the dumps, being bland and genial when I’m over-tired and stale on my job.”

But the truth was that he responded instantly to other people’s troubles and forgot his own when he was listening to theirs. He played a game of tiddley winks with that boy with the mumps, laughing heartily when he was beaten by that expert. Yet a few hours before he had been sitting in court at the inquest of poor little Phyllis, with a sense of anguish. He discussed a play he had seen with the actress in Ormonde Court and cheered her up by his enthusiasm for her art. Yet while he was talking to her the shadow of that court scene lurked in his mind. He chatted cheerfully as though life were as amusing as a drawing-room comedy, instead of

leading him so often to the hiding-places of misery and disease and despair. The bedside manner and those funny eyebrows of his—they were very helpful to his patients!

But a bit of a strain all the same. He felt fagged and dejected that evening when he sat with Janet after supper and she noticed it with her quick sympathy.

"Poor old Jacko! You ought to take a rest."

"It's not overwork," he said. "It's that horrible affair of Phyllis Dix. I can't get that girl out of my mind. Her pretty face haunts me, in a way. And her suicide is such a challenge to the moral smugness with which we regard this civilisation of ours. There's something damnably wrong with it all when such a thing can happen to a child like that."

Janet wasn't worried about civilisation.

"I'm thinking of that house in Cadogan Square," she said presently. "It's hideous for Cynthia. She must have seen the papers this evening."

"Yes," John answered bitterly. "Some kind soul will see to that! . . . In any case, she's bound to know. That fellow Basil——"

"It's ghastly for them both," said Janet. "That horrible father. He ought to be scragged!"

"Poor devil!" said John with that sense of pity which overwhelmed his loathing.

Janet was startled by that remark. To her a man like Sir Francis Ide was beyond all pity, outside the pale of human fellowship. She thought he was worse than a man who committed murder in a moment of blind passion. She thought death would not be too great a punishment for such wickedness and cruelty.

"John, I'm shocked at you!" she cried. "How can you say poor devil about a man like that?"

John elaborated his point of view for the sake of argument. He would feel sorry for the devil himself, he explained. In any case one had to make allowance for human passion and weakness. Men and women weren't entirely responsible for their own characters. Heredity couldn't be left out of account, for example, nor the follies of parents which caused two-thirds of life's unhappiness. The unconscious mind was wrongly educated. Then there was the

spirit of the age, to say nothing of disordered glands, nerve-strain and social maladjustments.

"Tout savoir c'est tout pardonner."

"How about Free Will?" asked Janet.

John pondered over that and could not find the answer.

"Sometimes I don't see where it comes in, I must confess. I suppose it does, in the ultimate analysis. . . . Anyhow, I'm convinced that one ought to be enormously pitiful, knowing one's own weaknesses. One never knows when one won't be caught in some trap of passion. It isn't wise—or fair—to hurl the first stone."

"There are some things one couldn't do," said Janet. "Many things you couldn't do, John, however tempted."

"That's my luck," he answered, "due to good parentage and decent upbringing. I inherited a code which coerces me and controls my instincts. Besides, I'm not so sure——"

For an hour or more this brother and sister talked things over, thinking aloud, worrying out the problem of passion, speaking with utter frankness, not catching each other up on small points, but trying to get at truth, and failing to do so, as, at last, they both admitted with a laugh.

"It's all very difficult," said John. "Let's get off this subject. How's Eric the Reckless?"

Eric had bought himself a car. It was something rather special in the way of cars, and costly, though he proposed to pay for it on the instalment system out of his magnificent salary. He also proposed to drive Janet in it to the other end of the world—at least, as far as Nice—if she would make a honeymoon trip of it as soon as he was through with "The Compact of Love."

"And how do you feel about it?" asked John curiously.

"I'm weakening," she told him, and laughed a little and blushed deeply.

And it was when they had got off the subject of their previous argument that it came banging at the door, so to speak. There was a rat-tat at the knocker unlike the postman's and not recognisable as one of their friends'. It was not like Eric's lively tattoo, nor like Smudge's undertaker's style.

"Who can that be?" asked Janet. "Not a patient, I hope!"

"Hell's bells!" exclaimed John irritably. "And I was looking forward to an early bed for once!"

They heard Mrs. Meggs wheezing down the hall to open the front door, and then there was the swish of silk and the sitting-room door opened, and a girl in an evening frock stood there like a white ghost. It was Cynthia, breathless as though she had been running, and very pale, with no colour at all in her face, and with a strange, scared look in her eyes.

"Oh," she said in a low voice, "I'm so sorry! I had to come."

"Cynthia!" cried Janet, deeply startled. "What's the matter?"

She put both hands to her forehead as though her head ached.

"I had to come," she said. "I feel safe here!"

"But Cynthia," said Janet, "what has happened? You look—lost."

"I *am* lost," said Cynthia. "I'm frightened—though it seems absurd to say so. It's all so horrible. I can't go through with it."

She began to move about the room like a beautiful thing that had just been caged, and then turned with an appealing look.

"Janet, do you think you could put me up for the night? I simply can't go home again."

Janet looked at her brother in a stupefied way. It was the night before this girl's marriage. The newspapers had been full of it. It was to be the wedding of the season.

"There's Eric's room," said John quietly.

For the first time Cynthia seemed aware of John's presence and she gave him a grateful look.

"Anything would do, if I could stay here for a night or two. I'm sure you understand."

Somehow he understood. Once before—he remembered—Cynthia had said she felt safe in this house. She had come here as a sanctuary from the moral atmosphere of her own home. She had fled here in her dreams. Now she had come. There must have been some frightful scene in that red house in Cadogan Square where the awning was up for her wedding. There was no need for words as far as he was concerned, though Janet wanted explanations.

"We don't understand, Cynthia. . . . What's going to happen about Basil?"

Cynthia gave a slight shudder, as though something cold had touched her.

"I never want to see him again," she said in a low voice. "I'm not going to marry him. I'm not going to marry anyone."

She had a tiny handkerchief screwed up in her hand, and she tore it to tatters as though unaware of physical action.

Then she went about the room again, shaking back her fair hair, cut like a boy's, and putting her hand up to her forehead.

"Oh!" she cried, "it's too horrible! It's too horrible!"

"Tell me!" said Janet, going to her and taking one of her hands. "Would you like John to leave the room? Tell me what has happened."

Cynthia didn't want John to leave the room. She turned round and spoke excitedly, with a kind of anger and scornfulness.

"Is there anything to tell? Don't you know? Why, the whole world knows! I suppose I was the only one who didn't know until half an hour ago, and then it was by accident."

"Didn't they tell you?" asked John.

"I was trying on my wedding-dress," she said. "One of the maids was reading an evening paper, and tried to hide it when I came into the sewing-room to look at myself in the mirror. She tried to hide it from me, and I laughed and snatched it from her, just for fun. I thought it was one of those photographs which make me look so silly sometimes. . . . And all across it was that filthy thing about father. . . . 'Suicide in Chelsea. Sir Francis Ide's friendship with little shop-girl.' . . . There was a portrait of the dead girl."

She made a strange little gesture, as though dropping the paper from her hands, and stood there looking across the room, as though she saw a vision of that dead girl who was Phyllis Dix.

"She was a pretty girl. She was dressed as Columbine, and laughed out of the photograph. It was father who made her kill herself. My father, Janet! . . . How can I get married after that?"

Janet remained silent. She could think of no answer to give this girl who had been so horribly shocked by the moral baseness of her own father. What was there to say? What kind of comfort could she give? She glanced at her brother as though he might

answer, but he stood there staring at the carpet, very gravely, as though baffled by a case like this. None of those arguments of his would give any comfort to Cynthia Ide.

"It has nothing to do with Basil," said Janet at last. "As long as you have faith in *him*——"

Cynthia laughed, and there was something terribly bitter in the sound of it.

"I haven't faith in him," she answered. "He's as bad as father. He hasn't father's decency to be ashamed. He's beastly all through. . . . Oh! it's a beastly world!"

"Oh, Cynthia!" cried Janet. "The world isn't all bad. Don't believe that. You're feeling bitter. You're too hard on Basil."

Cynthia's face flushed, and there was an angry flame in her eyes.

"I have a right to be bitter, and I'm not too hard on him."

She put her hand to her breast and touched a piece of paper which she had inside her frock.

"There's a girl who used to be at Oxford. I had a letter from her saying that Basil had been a beast to her. I didn't believe it at first, until I showed the letter to him yesterday. He just laughed about it and said it was the girl's fault. I hated him for that. I think I might have forgiven him if he hadn't blamed her for it all. I hate that sort of coward."

It might have been her fault, thought John, though he didn't say so. He wanted to be fair to Basil. It was utterly unfair that Basil's happiness should be wrecked by what Sir Francis Ide had done. Without knowing that girl at Oxford, or what had happened, it was impossible to pass judgment on Basil Hyde. There were pretty hussies who lay in wait for undergraduates. . . . He wanted to be fair to this girl's lover on the eve of his wedding-day. The situation was beyond all words. He could see no clear line of advice or helpfulness. It was a tragic conflict of moralities in which this girl's mind was horribly wounded. She had been spiritually immune from the moral atmosphere of that house in Cadogan Square. Somehow she had remained untouched by its vulgarities and coarseness—Lady Ide's questionable "pals," her father's friends with their smoke-room stories, the loose conversation of the night-club crowd—Basil's "poisonous set" as she had called them

once. Now she was hurt and horrified. Phyllis Dix was not the only victim of that inquest.

"Doctor," said Cynthia, "do you remember those dreams I told you about? I was always being chased by some horrid fear in my sleep."

"Yes," said John. "I remember."

"This time the fear came when I was awake," she told him. "It caught hold of me quite suddenly when I dropped that paper. I was desperate to escape from this awful marriage business. It isn't only Basil——"

She shivered a little as though there was a cold draught in the room, and Janet went to shut a window although it was a warm night. She did it perhaps as a relief to her emotion.

"That's why I came here, I suppose," said Cynthia. "Not that I thought of coming here exactly, until I found myself on your doorstep. I wrote a letter to mother, saying I couldn't marry Basil and was going away from home for a while. I don't know what I did with the letter, unless I left it lying on the table. I remember going downstairs, just as if it were a dream. . . . The servants were arranging things in the drawing-room, and I stood listening in the hall. . . . Then I opened the front door and went out, and started running. People must have thought I was mad. I only felt safe when I got here. It was like my dream. . . . Oh, I won't go back to that house, with father and Basil there. They're both—horrible!"

She sobbed in a choking way, and faltered forward and flung herself into Janet arms.

LIII

IT was John's sense of fairness that took him round to that house in Cadogan Square where the awning was up for a wedding next day. Janet had put Cynthia to bed in Eric's room, as they called it, but he had been given permission to go round and make some kind of explanation, subject to a fixed decision.

"Tell them I'm not going to get married, whatever they say."

Inside the house there were signs of mental disturbance and confusion. Pots of hothouse flowers were being delivered from a florist's van, but the young footman who was helping to carry them in was delivering himself of dark prophecies to one of the housemaids.

"Something very queer going on in my opinion. I wouldn't be surprised if these blooming flowers aren't all wasted. More likely we'll have the blinds down. Well I told you——"

He checked this narrative at the sight of John standing in the hall among the flower-pots.

"Show me up," said John.

He was taken up to the drawing-room on the first floor, and stood in a room brilliantly lighted by electric chandelabra gleaming on tables where Cynthia's wedding presents were set out in magnificent display. For a moment his eyes were dazzled by all this light, and then he was aware of three silent people staring at him as he advanced over the polished floor and its Persian rugs. Sir Francis Ide was standing with his back to the fireplace, chewing a cigar which had burnt out. Basil Hyde was sitting on the back of a sofa with his arms folded and a sullen, strained look about his mouth and eyes. And Lady Ide was leaning back in a low arm-chair with her eyes reddened by much weeping. Something had gone wrong with her face. Haggard lines had broken through her mask of paint and

powder. She looked a worn and raddled woman. There was a crumpled letter lying on the floor beside her chair.

"I have come with a message from your daughter," said John.

Sir Francis Ide took the stump of cigar from his lips and his mouth remained slightly open before he spoke with a kind of suppressed rage.

"Where is she?"

"At my house," said John.

He heard a slight movement from Basil Hyde, sitting there on the back of the sofa, and Lady Ide began to moan faintly like a wounded animal.

"Oh, I see," said Sir Francis. "That is where she is, is it?"

He allowed this thought to move about his mind, and seemed to ponder its implications before asking an angry question.

"Why the devil did she go to *your* house?"

John shrugged his shoulders. He was not inclined to be bullied by Sir Francis Ide.

"She came," he said. "I thought you might like to know."

"My darling Cynthia!" cried Lady Ide in a wailing voice.

Sir Francis Ide turned savagely on his wife.

"For God's sake control yourself, can't you?"

His nerves were all on edge. John noticed a pallor creep beneath his florid skin, and his hand trembled as he went over to a small table and fumbled for a cigar from a silver box and lit it at a little lamp burning for that purpose.

Basil Hyde moved again. He unfolded his arms and stood up from the sofa.

"Well," he said, "I think I'll go. . . . Good night."

He was in evening clothes, with a white camelia in his button-hole, and well-oiled hair, unruffled by this crisis in his life. His face was very pale and his dark eyes were moody, but there was a faint ironic smile on his lips as he gave one glance round the room where the wedding presents were displayed. He nodded to John and moved towards the door, but he hadn't gone more than a step or two before Sir Francis Ide put a heavy hand on his shoulder and swung him round.

"No, by God, you don't go," he said fiercely. "I'm not going to be made a laughing-stock before the whole world. For months

this wedding has been advertised in all the papers. There's hundreds of guests coming to-morrow. What do you think I'm going to do about it?"

"That's your affair," said Basil Hyde coldly. "You ought to have thought of that before you dragged my name into the mud with one of your dirty scandals. As it is . . ."

Sir Francis breathed heavily, still keeping his hand on the shoulder of young Hyde.

"Now look here," he said, "I'm not going to have any moral talk from you, my lad. You're going to marry Cynthia to-morrow morning or I'll break every bone in your body. You're a gentleman, aren't you? You and your blasted relatives call yourselves gentlemen, don't you? Well then, play the game for once."

An hysterical sound came from Lady Ide.

"It was going to be such a lovely wedding!" she cried.

Basil Hyde shook off Sir Francis Ide's grip from his shoulder and moved a pace or two away.

"We needn't indulge in melodrama," he said quietly. "Cynthia relieves me of the necessity of breaking my engagement. She doesn't want to marry me. She would rather die than marry me, I understand. It's in that letter to her mother, isn't it? . . . Well, I don't call myself a gentleman—it's an old-fashioned word nowadays—but I don't force myself where I'm not wanted. . . . In any case, perhaps it's a good thing—for me. As a father-in-law you're not what I should choose exactly, if you'll allow me to say so. . . . See the *Evening Standard*."

He moved again towards the door, but Sir Francis Ide strode past him, and stood between him and the door with clenched hands.

"You damned cad," he said. "You dirty swine. I'm not good enough to be your father-in-law, eh? But I was good enough to let you win money off me, night after night, at the bridge table. I was good enough not to remember your debts when you happened to lose. I was good enough to lend you money which you had no means of paying back, and never intended to pay back. You and your aristocratic relatives were not above eating my food and drinking my wines, and smoking my cigars, and cadging for shares in my companies."

"Frank!" cried Lady Ide. "You're killing me. I can't bear it. All this worry . . ."

"For heaven's sake stop that noise," said Sir Francis Ide.

But she didn't stop that noise. She began to breathe jerkily with her hands to her throat.

"I feel ill!" she cried. "I feel—dreadful!"

She stood up from her chair, clutching at something as though for support, and then fell in a twisted way on the floor so suddenly that John did not move quick enough to save her. Her face had twisted as well as her body. Lady Ide, who had been *Dulcie Devereux*, did not look young and beautiful as she lay there after something had happened to the blood vessels of the brain.

"Jesus Christ!" said Sir Francis Ide in a low voice, and it was like the prayer of a guilty man. Suddenly all his rage left him and fear came to him, and perhaps a surge of remembrance and affection for this woman whom once he had loved. He went down on his knees beside her, and tried to lift her in his arms so that her head flopped against his shoulder. Pretty Phyllis was not the only victim of his passionate infidelities. . . .

Basil Hyde stood for a few moments looking at the wreck of the woman who would have been his mother-in-law but for a suicide in Chelsea. There was nothing he could do about it. This house in Cadogan Square had become disagreeable to him. He took the white camelia from his buttonhole and let it drop on the polished boards. Then he went quietly out of the room, and out of the house. There would be no wedding next day as far as he was concerned.

THE routine of a doctor's life went on. Other calls came for Dr. Jevons. New cases absorbed his attention. The telephone bell next to his bed awakened him from his first sleep now and then. The golden light of a fine September glinted down the King's Road and the leaves on the trees down Royal Avenue and in the Chelsea Gardens and in all the squares and crescents on his rounds crinkled and browned and burnt.

Janet hadn't gone to the end of the earth yet with Eric Pardoe in his new car, or even as far as Nice. That young man had gone up north to see his mother who was ill—at death's door, according to his father's telegram—and for some reason was fretting for him, though she had not bothered much about him when he needed her most, as a small boy unhappy at school.

But for John, during these September days, there was a sense of some unaccustomed happiness, at the back of his mind as we say, even when he was intent on some case of his. He got up in the mornings with an awareness of some pleasurable excitement in himself. Life somehow seemed more interesting. A new day offered some secret joy which he preferred not to bring too clearly to consciousness or intellectual analysis. He found himself buying flowers—all golden now—for Janet's decoration of the sitting-room. He whistled like an errand boy as he walked to his cases. He strode home—especially at tea-time—as a man in a hurry not to miss something good in wait for him. The fact was that Cynthia was staying in his house, and he liked to have her there.

He could never get quite used to having her there. It amazed him always to see her at the breakfast-table, in some slip of a frock which revealed her boyish figure, or in a dressing-gown upon which some painter like Brangwyn seemed to have thrown all the colours of his palette. It was still more astonishing to find her there in the evenings, generally on the hearth-rug with her head leaning

against Janet and her hands clasped round her long legs. How had this flower-like beauty taken up residence in this miniature house in Walpole Street? How had it happened that she preferred this little sanctuary to all others? Well, that was nice of her. He liked to have her there.

She had gone home after her mother's "stroke," and had stayed there until Lady Ide was taken in an ambulance to a nursing-home in Bournemouth, on the advice of Dr. Wainwright, who had been called in for consultation. That sudden illness had covered up the public scandal of a cancelled wedding. The newspapers had been sympathetic, and only one or two hinted at the possible connection between the illness of Lady Ide—"so famous in the old days as Dulcie Devereux"—and the inquest on a shop-girl in Chelsea. Not that it mattered much to Lady Ide who did not read the newspapers now, and was paralysed down one side of her face and body, and strangely enough—as though by some divine compensation—seemed happier like that than when she had gone dancing with Benito who taught her bad habits for her headaches.

Sir Francis Ide was staying at Bournemouth, so that he might call every day and hold her hand. She seemed to like holding his hand, as though they were both young again before the days of that big house in Cadogan Square, and the knighthood, and all the worry of a social position. Before going down he called round on John, looking broken and shamefaced. It was his unhappiness which stirred that sense of pity which was John's peculiar quality or weakness. The man's eyes were like those of a beaten animal.

"I understand my daughter wants to stay with your sister," he said. "Well, it will be nice of you if you'll look after her. She's not in good health, I should say. Nervy and all that—after what's happened. That young scoundrel Hyde——"

"We shall be glad to have her," said John.

Sir Francis Ide said something about paying. He was deeply obliged to John for his attention to her ladyship.

"My poor wife!" he exclaimed, dropping that "ladyship" for once. "Done for, poor soul. A physical and mental wreck. And partly my fault, I'm afraid. Well, that's life, curse it!"

John didn't argue with him about life. He said again that Janet

would be glad to have Cynthia to stay—for any time she liked. There was no question of payment.

Sir Francis Ide lingered for a few moments. On going, he stood at the door in a shy, hesitating way, as though wanting to say something else. Then he said it huskily.

“Don’t let Cynthia hate me too much! . . . She’s all I have now. . . . If you could get her to understand——”

He nodded again and said “Good morning, and many thanks,” and did not hear John’s words of “poor swine!” when he went off in that Rolls-Royce. So it was that Cynthia came to stay with them during those golden days in September.

FOR some days after her coming to Walpole Street Cynthia was a patient rather than a guest. She had been badly shocked by the opening of that Bluebeard's cupboard in her father's house and by that letter revealing the unpleasant past of Basil Hood. Together, no doubt, they had put a black smudge across her vision of life and had frightened her into thinking that all life was as ugly as that. She was frightened of the passion which makes beasts of men and women and that fear invaded the inner sanctuary of her mind.

"I'm getting scared about her," said Janet. "She lies awake at night thinking too much. In the morning when I take up breakfast she looks as if she had been staring at the pattern of the wallpaper since daybreak—and looking right through the wall!"

"I dare say she's a bit bewildered," said John.

In his own mind he thought that some bridge had broken between her dream-world and reality, and at the moment she was looking across the precipice. In other words, she was trying to reconcile the ugly facts of life with her previous ideals. He was glad to see her at breakfast one morning looking more cheerful. She had confided to Janet that she was ashamed of herself for inflicting her "blues" on other people, especially as she had had a lucky escape.

"I ought to be extremely grateful," she said. "I've been saved from marriage, anyhow, in the very nick of time!"

Janet did not argue just then about marriage upon which she had different ideas. It was good enough to see that Cynthia was getting her courage back and making an effort to fight those little blue devils which had laid her low. Her sense of humour helped her and she laughed naturally when John told her some comic anecdotes about his experiences as a ship's doctor or described some of his eccentric patients, and presently—that shadow which had

blackened all life for her crept away from her consciousness and lingered only in the innermost chamber of her mind with that fear which had always haunted her.

John studied her with a secret and emotional interest. In some way which he could hardly analyse she was different from the "Society" girls with whom he came in touch professionally, now and then. They were realists, as far as he could make them out. They were apt to be humorous on the subject of love and passion. They were certainly not afraid of their natural and emotional impulses. Anyhow, they made a fashion of free-speech and free-thought with an audacity which was partly a pose, perhaps. But Cynthia, though she belonged to them, and used their jargon sometimes, and moved in their world, had some hidden sensitiveness which she kept secret from them. At least, so he guessed. It was as though she had always withdrawn herself from the vulgarity of her father's house with an unconscious resistance to its moral atmosphere in some spiritual conflict against her mother's ideas of having "a good time" and Sir Francis Ide's philosophy—or habit—of sensuality.

This daughter of a woman who had sung suggestive songs in pre-war music halls had been brought up in a convent school where the nuns had hidden the unpleasant side of life from her. Perhaps that accounted for the sense of futility—that spiritual emptiness—with which she had gone through the social round, with its dances and night clubs, and its artificial gaiety of the Lido and the Côte d'Azur. Perhaps that was the key to this hidden conflict in her mind.

From the spiritual idealism of a convent school she had gone straight into a world of frivolity conscious of the nudges and winks of Lady Ide's "pals," hearing hints about her father's private life, listening to the conversation of girls who had not been cloistered, and conscious of something evil around her without understanding it, or at least without letting it break down her inner defences. Was that what had happened? And yet it was absurd to pretend that she was an innocent little Miss of the Victorian type. She read all those novels which deal with the emotional side of life without much reticence. Men had made love to her. In the modern way she had gone out alone with boys of her age and type. She had been

adventurous, even, in her comradeship with men like Basil Hyde driving with them at night, letting them kiss her, liking to be kissed. She had played with passion, but had been afraid of it, afraid of herself when passion touched her too closely. It was a conflict between some secret timidity, even some lurking terror, in her unconscious mind, and the desire for adventure, gaiety and love. Her shrinking from marriage was a sign of this and there was something instinctive and unrevealed in her sudden flight from that house in Cadogan Square. It was as though the tragedy of Phyllis Dix and the letter about Basil Hyde had been the excuse rather than the cause of her escape from marriage—"in the nick of time"—as she said.

So John tried to diagnose that girl who had come into his house with her slim beauty, her look of boyishness, and that indefinable charm which attracted most men and put a spell on him. Yet this analysis did not satisfy him, and anyhow, he was now her friend and not her doctor so that he did not attempt to probe her mind. He was a little shy of her, to tell the truth, perhaps because that professional barrier had gone and he was in the ordinary relationship of friendship with her, across the breakfast-table, and at tea-time when he hurried home to a new pleasure in life because she would be there giving a kind of radiance to his simply furnished room.

To keep her from feeling lonely Janet invited her friends in sometimes after supper. Nina Ziborova came with her little cries of ecstasy over some frock that Cynthia was wearing—she had sent for them from Cadogan Square—and an alarming habit of discussing life with Russian realism translated into humorous English. Her brother Serge appeared again to kiss Janet's hands with devotional gravity before lapsing into his deep melancholy while he smoked innumerable cigarettes with cardboard mouth-pieces, meditating upon the downfall of Russia or—perhaps—the wholesale price of ladies' underclothing. Betty Truslove, who was now Mrs. Thistledown, brought her red-haired husband when he was not working late at the sub-editor's desk, and those two slanged each other outrageously, insulted each other grossly, laughed noisily when they described the absurd adventure of marriage (as they called it) and failed to disguise their mutual adoration.

John saw Cynthia now and then watching them with a kind of

wonderment and thoughtfulness. Betty was curiously unchanged after marriage. Its adventure and risk did not seem to worry her at all. She hadn't agonised over secret fears. And Birdie Thistle-down with his whimsical eyes puckered about with little lines of humour looked honest and kind. It was difficult to believe that he had had an unpleasant past like Basil Hyde or that he would betray Betty one day by seducing some little-shop-girl. Perhaps such ideas as those were passing through Cynthia's mind when she looked at that newly-married couple so thoughtfully, and then laughed at one of their absurd remarks.

Another visitor was Gilbert Blake, that unsuccessful writer of plays and novels who had called for John one night when he was on the edge of a nervous breakdown. He came in one evening, and asked for Janet and she saw him alone in another room—forgetting to shut the door—while John and Cynthia were discussing a new novel by Galsworthy. Presently they could hear Smudge, as Janet called him, speaking loudly and harshly interrupted by Janet's low-toned voice now and then.

"What's the matter with Smudge?" asked Cynthia, listening to those two voices.

"Goodness knows," said John. "He seems to be worried about something. He worries about almost everything."

He went to the door to close it, but as he did so he heard some words from the next room very clearly.

"If I weren't such a coward I'd write *finis* to this farce of life. . . . It's utterly futile."

"Oh, Smudge!" cried Janet emotionally, "don't haul your flag down. You're one of our idealists."

John came back and shut the door quietly.

"What were you saying about Galsworthy?" he asked.

Cynthia did not say any more about Galsworthy. She had heard those words from the next room through the half-opened door and looked distressed.

"Did you hear what Smudge said?" she asked.

"Yes," said John. "They ought to have shut that door. In a little house like this——"

Cynthia listened again to those voices murmuring in the next room.

"Poor Smudge! I'm afraid he's terribly unhappy. He oughtn't to have married Lucy. She's utterly selfish, and sneers at his work because he doesn't earn enough money to keep her in the lap of luxury. It's disgusting the way she speaks to him sometimes."

"Well," said John, "I daresay he's rather a trial. He specialises in unhappiness. Perhaps that gets on her nerves sometimes. It's only fair to look at her side of the case, don't you think?"

Cynthia shook her head, not admitting that Lucy had any defence.

"She's heartless. I know her rather well. She was keen on Basil for a time before she married Smudge."

She thought back to certain episodes which belonged to her own private history and then looked up at John again and asked a worried question.

"Is there any such thing as happiness? We all seem—tortured. We torture ourselves if no one does it for us. It seems as though there were something inside ourselves which always hurts. Can you understand it at all?"

John didn't profess to understand it. He could not deny it. There was always something inside oneself which seemed to hurt, as this girl said—a yearning for the ideal happiness which never happened, a conflict between the flesh and the spirit, or between the individual mind and the eternal mystery of things. One could only get moments of happiness, perhaps, in self-forgetfulness, or occasionally by an intense awareness to beauty and life, or just now and then by some deep and subtle sense of well-being amounting, at its best, to ecstasy. Health had something to do with it, but that wasn't enough. Love when it was sublimated so that body and spirit were in a state of exaltation might provide the way to such moments of bliss. Spiritual love, a tremendous belief in divine goodness, a flaming and, all consuming passion of faith, was the highest form of happiness according to the mystics. But that was outside his mental range. One day, perhaps he might get a glimpse of such mysteries. Now he was content with smaller satisfactions, such as being in the same room with this girl whose beauty enchanted him, quite unreasonably.

He evaded a real answer to her question—tremendous questions

which had baffled wiser men than himself through all the ages—and made some vague reply.

“I’m afraid we’re all too introspective. We keep on looking at our own souls to see if we’re as happy as we ought to be. It’s best to look at life objectively and leave oneself out as much as possible. Don’t you agree?”

“I suppose so,” said Cynthia doubtfully. “But personally I can’t leave myself out! Isn’t that the difficulty?”

It was some time after that when the door opened and Janet came in with Gilbert Blake. They both looked as though that conversation had been too emotional, but Janet spoke in her cheerful way to hide an awkward situation.

“Sorry to have been so long! Smudge and I were having a heart to heart talk. What about a game of bridge, you people?”

“Not a bad idea,” said John.

“I should love it,” said Cynthia.

She held out her hand to Gilbert Blake and he kissed it gravely and tenderly as though to express his sympathy for that recent ordeal of hers.

But the game of bridge was not a success. Smudge, as they called him, was absent-minded and trumped one of his partner’s tricks, and then revoked abominably, so that Cynthia laughed and called him a duffer.

“Not my game, I’m afraid!” he remarked, thrusting his fingers through his hair and smiling at his own absurdity.

“I believe you’re thinking out a new plot, Smudge,” said Cynthia, to cover up his embarrassment.

“No, an old plot—as old as hell, if you’ll forgive the word.”

He laughed, but with a slight “edge” to his voice which revealed a hidden bitterness.

“I don’t mind the word,” said Cynthia, “but your plots are always original, Smudge. Nobody thinks of such charming ideas.”

His face flushed slightly and he turned to smile at this tribute.

“I wish my critics were as kind as you!”

Once again, as John noticed, a word of praise was like precious cordial to him. Like all artists he needed encouragement as the very breath of life. Without it his soul felt starved. After all, it wasn't quite the same thing as vanity, thought John, watching him for a moment. A man doesn't write or paint entirely for his own pleasure. Unless he pleases his public he has failed in his purpose, and all his labour has been in vain—this exhausting labour of creative work, built up by introspection, dragged up from his subconscious mind, to make a plot or a play—good or bad—after months of toil.

"Whatever the critics say or fail to say," said Janet, "that last novel of yours has been a success, Smudge. You can't deny that. The public are asking for you at the libraries."

"It comes too late, I'm afraid," he answered, and gave an uneasy laugh.

"One of life's little ironies," he added and glanced at Janet as though she understood his meaning.

"The turn of luck," she answered quickly. "The promise of success."

He shrugged his shoulders slightly as though, after all, success was a poor thing.

"I'm not one of the lucky ones. . . . Not that I want to inflict my woes on the present company."

He was certainly inflicting his melancholy on them, but they conspired to cheer him up, and Cynthia succeeded in winning a smile from him now and then, and after a while he seemed to forget his private troubles in a discussion about new books. His conversation developed into a monologue for a time, and he said some bitter things about the downfall of idealism and some ironical things about the new school of fiction, while Cynthia sat listening with her chin on her clasped hands and Janet kept him interested in his own argument by provocative remarks.

John was aware of some psychological drama happening in this room of his. That fellow Smudge was talking to forget himself, and suffering from some secret strain which he was trying to resist. Janet was playing up to him, giving him a friendly lead, trying to steer his thoughts away from the dark hinterland of his mind in which some demon was nagging at him; and Cynthia

was watching him with a look of concern and pity, aware that he was suffering somehow. Neither he nor Janet knew that some of their words had been overheard through a half-open door. "If I weren't such a coward I would write *finis* to this farce of life." Probably he had quarrelled with Lucy again. They had gone on nagging at each other's nerves. He had said unforgivable things to her—or she to him. And then he had come round to Janet to get that sympathy for which he craved, indulging in self-pity—the usual weakness of the neurasthenic mind, making his own hell. It was one of the maladies of the age, and the doctor knew every trick of it, every morbid symptom, from other patients on his rounds. The touch of egotism in Smudge's way of talking, his rapid flow of words, his nervous laugh, were equally symptomatic of a disease which has its origin in self-love and thwarted impulses. And yet there was something charming about him, because of his fine thoughtful face and the look of a man who is sensitive to the beauty of life, with a hatred of cruelty and all beastliness. He had good manners and it was pleasant to see his smiling deference to Cynthia when she interrupted his monologue now and then. He was an egoist and an intravert, but like so many of that type more attractive than the plain blunt man without nerves or imagination. How extraordinarily difficult to get the perfect balance!

He stayed late—too late for a doctor who liked an early bed when he could get the chance. Janet encouraged him to stay late, and when he hinted, once or twice, that he ought to be going, insisted that it was quite early.

At last he stood up and decided to go.

"No hurry, Smudge," said Janet. "Have some whiskey?"

He declined the offer, much to John's relief. After all, friendship could be carried too far into the night.

"I'm afraid I've bored you all dreadfully. When I stay talking in friendly company——"

"We liked it," said Cynthia, "speaking for myself!"

"Speaking for all of us," said Janet.

"Still," remarked John candidly, "bed's a good thing."

For a moment Smudge laughed at this frank hint that he had overstayed his time. Then suddenly the expression of his face changed to profound melancholy.

"Not for a sleepless man."

He stood there for a moment staring at the floor.

Then he raised his head and made another apology.

"Sorry for staying so long. It was very selfish of me. Good night."

Janet went out into the hall with him and stayed talking in a low voice for a few moments before letting him out of the front door, while Cynthia lit a cigarette after a long abstinence that evening.

"Tired?" she asked John when he hid a slight yawn.

"I'm a glutton for sleep," he confessed. "I can't keep fit without it. That young man was interesting—but just an hour too long."

"Poor Smudge!" said Cynthia.

"Oh, you cheered him up wonderfully," said John. "He was quite gay towards the end of the evening . . . until he remembered to be sorry for himself."

He was remorseful afterwards for having said that. It was when Janet came back into the room and overheard his words and answered them.

"Smudge was a hero to-night. Lucy has gone off with another man. He feels—stricken."

For a moment there was silence in the room, and John stood thinking over this news. No, he hadn't been quite fair to Gilbert Blake. For a man of nerves he had played a good game this evening. He had fought for self-control and put on that mask of irony like a man in the front-line trenches under fire. A very good bit of acting by a man who wrote plays. One up to Smudge!

Cynthia gave a cry of dismay.

"Oh, I'm sorry! . . . How horrible of Lucy! . . . How shameful of her."

She moved about the room in that restless way she had when she was distressed and emotional.

"Isn't there any such thing as loyalty nowadays?" she asked with a kind of despair in her voice. "Isn't there any decency? Father and Basil—and now Lucy! Have we all gone bad? Is the whole world rotten?"

“Not rotten,” said John, “but going through a difficult time, as usual. . . . I’m sorry about Smudge.”

He was sorry also that this thing had upset Cynthia’s faith in life and love again. It seemed to her another proof that marriage was ghastly. She used that word “ghastly!” with a sound of anguish in her voice.

LVI

THERE were not so many calls for Dr. Jevons of Walpole Street during these summer months. The influenza microbe had retreated when its victims had begun to open their windows and get into sunlight and fresh air. Its ravages were duly recorded in statistics, the undertakers had reaped a golden harvest, and the doctors, who had also profited, knew no more about its life history than they did about other germs which humiliate the scientist and make a mockery of medicine. Babies were born in Chelsea and its neighbourhood, more frequently in slum tenements than in the latest type of service flat. The motor-car, like a modern Moloch, demanded the lives and limbs of old and young. The strain of modern civilisation kept up the supply of neurasthenia, heart failure and mental maladjustments. The hot weather combined with dishonest traders and the law against preservatives to produce a fair amount of gastric poisoning. There were tennis elbows, hay fevers, whooping coughs and other afflictions of the human body, but on the whole hardly enough to pay the rents in Harley Street and not enough to keep a general practitioner in Walpole Street as busy as he thought he ought to be.

For the first time since he had put up his brass plate, or at least since his telephone bell had started ringing, John had leisure enough to take an afternoon off now and then and spend an evening out without the almost certain risk of neglecting an urgent case. This period of comparative ease coincided with Cynthia's visit, so that they were alone together more often than was good for his peace of mind, though he didn't complain. Janet was away all day at the hat shop as usual, having arranged to take her holiday when Eric returned from his visit up north. So it happened that for a week or two John and Cynthia took tea together, and went for walks as far as Kensington Gardens and sat sometimes among the children and the nursemaids with the sun in their eyes and the sunburnt grass beneath their feet and the roar of London traffic like the mur-

mur of the sea beyond the railings. They had slipped into a comradeship which did not need continual conversation. Cynthia had a habit of taking off her hat and dropping it on the grass by her side so that the sun played tricks of light with her hair. She looked enchanting in her summer frocks and John noticed that men who passed invariably turned their heads to take a second look at her and then a glance at him with a faint smile of envy for his luck. Even the man who tinkled his bell after handing out tickets for the chairs said "Good afternoon, miss," when they had been there two or three times, and one old gentleman, in a top hat a little rakish over his right eye, took a chair near to them deliberately for the pleasure of looking at Cynthia now and then as he might have sat before the portrait of a beautiful woman in the National Gallery. Children came up to her to show her their dolls or their puppy dogs, and she made friends with one small boy of seven, as he was good enough to inform them, who ignored the calls of his nurse while he gossiped with Cynthia.

"I'm talking to the pretty lady," he shouted back. "I'm telling her about my new boat."

There was a touch of magic about her which drew people's eyes and hearts and made life seem more enchanting on a summer day. It was the magic of beauty, more rare than prettiness though that is good, for she had some grace, beyond that of other good-looking girls who came striding across the grass in their short frocks. At least this doctor thought so sitting by her side. And yet she was one of this modern sisterhood of long-legged things with only an indefinable difference of manner and mode. No doubt her frocks were more expensive than those of many girls in High Street, Kensington. Perhaps her shingled hair had an extraordinary glint of gold. She was less conscious than most of them of her own attractiveness. But that explained nothing or very little as to why park-keepers touched their caps to her, the dull eyes of old men brightened at the look of her and other girls nudged each other as she passed, and even a child like that boy of seven came to do homage to her. An artist would have chosen her for a pencil sketch or a dry paint as she sat with her frock above her knees with her hat on the grass beside her chair and more often than not with a cigarette in a long holder sending up a little ribbon of smoke. She was the type of

her age and time as perfect perhaps as one could meet at a period of history when beyond all doubt girlhood has gained most in beauty.

The boy of seven was delighted to see her again next time they sat in Kensington Gardens, and came running across from a group of perambulators parked beneath the trees beyond the Round Pond.

"Hullo!" he shouted. "I've got a new engine. Daddy gave it me because nobody takes much notice of me now that I have a little sister."

"A new little sister?" asked Cynthia.

"Oh, perfectly new!" said the boy. "A week old. She's frightfully ugly, but mother says she's going to be pretty. I hope she'll hurry up because she's beastly now. All screwed up in the face, you know like this."

He made a hideous grimace and then laughed at this successful imitation of a new-born babe.

"She's got a bald head," he said. "Just like an old gentleman. I'll ask my nurse if you can have a look at her if you'd like to."

"Oh, no," said Cynthia, "don't worry your nurse. I expect your little sister doesn't like being stared at."

"Oh, she doesn't mind," the boy assured her gravely. "She hasn't any sense in her head yet. She's just like a new kitten you know before it gets its eyes open properly. You can stare at her as much as you like."

Reluctantly and rather shyly Cynthia allowed herself to be led over to that park of perambulators by this young cavalier who had taken charge of her. John followed her at the distance of a yard or two and saw her talking and smiling to a nurse who stood up as she came near with the small boy.

"Isn't she frightful," cried that youth, peering into the perambulator. "There's a monkey at the Zoo just like my baby sister. . . . Monkey face! Monkey face!"

"Now, master Julian," said the nurse severely.

Cynthia bent over the perambulator and touched the baby's cheek and then put her finger into a little clutching hand which held on tight.

"How wonderful!" she said. "She won't let go again!"

The nurse seemed gratified at these words.

"Oh, she's fine for her age, miss. A bonny young lady. They've

christened her Joyce. Master Julian pretends he doesn't like her, but that's because he's jealous. It's always the way when the first-born finds he's not the only pebble on the beach!"

That small bit of life called Joyce was gazing at Cynthia and gave a little chuckle of laughter.

"Oh, isn't she delicious!" cried Cynthia.

"She's taken a fancy to you, miss. She doesn't laugh at most people like that."

Cynthia blushed at this compliment as perhaps she had never blushed at the flattery of men.

When she returned to John and strolled back across the Gardens she had a smile about her lips and presently she turned her head towards him and said something rather startling but with a simplicity which touched him.

"I should like to have a baby beyond anything in the world. It's a pity I can't have one unless I marry somebody."

John laughed inwardly at this point of view, but was careful to answer seriously.

"Well, it's generally necessary to have a father for the child."

"I know," said Cynthia. "That's the snag. I wish things hadn't been arranged like that."

They strolled along towards the Albert Gate and John wondered how far he could go in this discussion. He rather wanted to say things about the beauty of that arrangement, if there were loyalty between a woman and her mate. But he decided not to speak aloud all the thoughts which came surging into his mind on this subject. Somewhere in this girl's inner sanctuary was still that fear of love. He would have to go carefully lest he should blunder against that closed door.

"It's not a bad arrangement," he said. "A woman needn't be afraid of marriage if she gets hold of a decent man."

"How can one be sure of his decency?" asked Cynthia. "How does one know that he won't be a brute?"

John tried to reassure her.

"Men aren't brutal as a rule to the women they love. They may be weak but they're not brutal. As a matter of fact, most men nowadays are too sensitive and highly strung and—womanish."

"How about father?" asked Cynthia coldly.

John was silent for a moment. It was a staggering and painful question. There were many things he could say about Cynthia's father, but they involved a thousand arguments about mental and moral strains.

"I shouldn't call him a brutal man," he said quietly. "I should call him a victim of social disorder and moral indiscipline. A man to be pitied, surely, because he hates himself."

"He caused that girl's death," said Cynthia with a painful break in her voice. "He's unforgivable."

John found himself defending Sir Francis Ide, not for that man's sake because of his baseness, but for the sake of this girl's mind, warped in her ideas of life.

"He was terribly thoughtless. That's the cause of all tragedy, don't you think? It's because we get wrong in our thoughts that we make such a hell of life, and hurt people, and torture ourselves, as you said the other day. I find that most of my patients are suffering from thoughtlessness. Their bodies would be all right mostly if they did a bit more thinking. Certainly they would suffer less if they had had the right ideas put into their heads when they were children. That baby in the perambulator just now—I shudder to think of all the nonsense and fears and frightfulness that will be stored up in its unconscious mind before it learns to run about and find things out for itself. I would like to have a baby or two—half a dozen of them!—and bring them up without fear and with a sense of beauty as their daily food. It would be a great experiment."

Cynthia turned towards him with surprise.

"Are you fond of babies, too?"

"Rather! One day I hope to be the father of a big family. Six at least."

"Good heavens!" said Cynthia. "Isn't that rather old-fashioned?"


"I'm an old-fashioned man," said John with a sudden laugh, which amused a taxi driver crawling down Knightsbridge.

Cynthia put her hand on his arm as they prepared to cross the road.

"Oh, Doctor, make me the godmother of your first baby! I'd love to fuss about with it. I'd be the fairy godmother and only bring gifts to its cradle."

The sun was shining down Knightsbridge and the buses were lurching by with their painted boards. A policeman with white sleeves held up the traffic for a moment longer than he needed in order that John could get across with this pretty girl. And this doctor who wasn't a grey-beard, but a youngish man with humorous eyebrows and a very human heart, had a ridiculous idea of keeping traffic waiting while he had Cynthia's hand on his arm and told her quite simply that he didn't want her to be a godmother of his unborn children even though she was a fairy godmother, but the mother of them, and the comrade of his worshipful love in that little house in Walpole Street. He wanted to take the fear of marriage out of her heart, and to prove to her that there was still loyalty in the world, and that the passion of love when it is uplifted by the spirit is as near happiness as human nature can reach by the divine sanction which surely created it. He wanted to tell her that he would be her good man and servant if she could put up with his poverty and wait for him while he went his rounds and forget all that luxury in which she had been brought up. He wanted to tell her that they could make a merry game of life in that little house of his and that if she wanted to have a baby beyond anything in the world there was no reason in his mind why she should shirk such a jolly idea. But as a matter of fact the policeman dropped one white-sleeved arm, the traffic surged out of the Albert Gate, and by the time he reached the other pavement Dr. John Jevons had lost his courage to say those things to a girl who walked beside him keeping pace to his long stride with her hand on his arm.

"One of these days," he said, "I may find a girl willing to forgive this funny face of mine."



LVII

A MORRIS-OXFORD was idling in Pavilion Road—that street of garages between Knightsbridge and the King's Road—during the doctor's slack time and he decided to give it a little exercise now and then by taking Cynthia—and Janet when she could get away—to pleasant places within an hour or two of town. They ran out to Guildford, and got jammed in the tide of traffic down the High Street, and lunched at the old Lion. Cynthia took the wheel now and then and scared a man whose nerves were fairly steady by doing fifty along the Hog's Back to Farnham, and missing a farm cart by the eighth of an inch.

"Hi!" he said. "My life is very valuable to some old ladies I know."

"I drive by instinct," she told him. "You needn't worry."

He did worry, having a strong sense of self-preservation. Besides, he would hate to see this girl's beauty mangled in a Surrey ditch.

She scared him again along the by-pass to Esher on the way home from Winchester—their farthest run—where she passed more powerful cars than his with a scream of the horn which commanded them to make way for a lady.

"For heaven's sake," said Dr. Jevons when she missed a head-on which looked inevitable.

"It's quite all right," she said, smiling at him in the mirror above her head. "I've never hit anything yet."

"No, but something may hit you," answered John. "The effect is exactly the same."

"You're safe with me," she told him. "It's a gift."

She had a passion for speed, and jeered at him for the cautious way in which he drove, never taking a risk if he could help it and allowing himself to be passed by any old junk.

"This is a joy ride," he said once when she urged him to see

what he could do to get a move on. "The hurry of life is what puts people's nerves on edge. Why keep moving so fast? Let's go and sleep with the sun on our faces."

He drove the car on to a Surrey common among the gorse bushes, and presently she took his advice and slept with the sun on her face. But he didn't sleep. He pulled out a sketch book and made a pencil drawing of her there in her flowered frock with both arms behind her head and a little hat by her side. It wasn't a bad drawing, he thought, but he didn't show it to her when presently after twenty minutes or so she sat up and laughed.

"I think I must have slept for a moment. Isn't this good?"

It was very good to a hard worked doctor. For once in a while they had got away from the streets. Here on this common, away from the road, there was no other human being in sight. The sun poured down on them from a blue sky. A lark was singing its heart out up there. The grass beneath them was warm and scorched. The motor horns were sounding faintly down the Portsmouth Road.

"Not bored?" asked John.

"Happy," she admitted. "This is a golden day. Don't you like it?"

He liked it almost too much. He would miss the comradeship of this girl when she went away. This last week or two had been very pleasant, and to tell the truth, emotional. It was ridiculous to hide from himself the fact that he was very much in love. This girl was like the music of life to him. From the first time he had seen her he had been enchanted by her personality, and by something beyond her physical grace. It was a spiritual touch about her which more than beauty itself thrilled him. It was quite beyond psychological analysis. She did not reveal any wonderful qualities of mind or character. But he knew that never in the world again would he meet any one who would stir in him the same sense of ecstasy as this Cynthia who now sat on the grass before him with the sun playing about her hair. In a week or two as she had told Janet her visit would come to an end. Her mother wanted her and she was going down to Bournemouth to be near that nursing home as soon as her father returned to town. In a little while this comradeship would be only an enchanting memory unless some day he could

persuade her to make it last for a lifetime. Not now! Her break with Basil, that cancelled wedding, had left her spirit sore. He would have to wait until that wound had healed. In any case, he would have to release her mind from that disgust of marriage which had got deep into her consciousness, and lay perhaps further back in some unconscious memory of childhood which had estranged her from the father who must always be the intermediary between girlhood and the other sex. At the critical moment of her life when she wanted confidence in the unknown male who was to be her mate, he had failed her by not being trustworthy. His habits as a husband, some brutality to his wife in the presence of this girl away back in her babyhood perhaps, had created this secret hostility in the hiding-places of her mind against the idea of giving herself to any kind of husband who might ill-use her in the same way. He would have to give her time before he could offer himself as a man who would love her so that she need not be afraid. Perhaps in a year or two——

She had no idea that he had any touch of passion. Her confidence in him was perfect and unspoilt, perhaps because he was a doctor, or the brother of Janet, for whom, she had a devotional regard. Several times when he was driving she leaned her head against his shoulder, and once when they were in Richmond Park, on a hot afternoon, under one of the old oaks there, with a herd of deer quite close to them, she lay by his side on a rug he had spread above the bracken, as he leaned on one elbow and smoked his pipe. It was like having a young sister who regarded him as a friendly comrade with whom she could discuss books, and ideas, and life, and anything without the timidities of sex. Well, that was very pleasant, but it would have been pleasanter if he could have kissed her beneath the chin as she lay there looking up at the old branches of that twisted oak, or turned to her and taken her in his arms.

One afternoon, for the sake of variety and a little exercise, John proposed taking her for a row on the Serpentine and the idea appealed to her as a good joke.

"I've a good mind to do this every morning before breakfast," said John, pulling a long lazy stroke. "I'm ashamed of myself for neglecting such a glorious opportunity of keeping fit in this mechanised civilisation."

Cynthia held the rudder lines and was erratic in her steering and very much amused.

"If some of my friends could see me now they wouldn't believe their eyes. . . . Hi, there! Where do you think you're going?"

Three messenger boys rowing the windmill stroke collided with their frail bark.

"Your fault, miss!" shouted one of them cheekily. "Flirting with your young man again. I'll tell your Ma when I get home."

Cynthia blushed and refrained from back-chat.

"Nasty little beasts!" she said when these pirates had passed.

From the bank this doctor and that girl in a flowered frock were watched by strolling nursemaids and old gentlemen walking off their lunch and girls taking their dogs for a walk, and presently someone waved to them and called out Cynthia's name.

"It's Nina," said Cynthia, "and my reputation is lost! She'll tell all her friends that she saw me steering a gentleman who rowed in his braces."

"Yes, it's my braces that spoil the picture," said John.

They ran alongside the bank and Nina Ziborova jeered at them.

"O, la la! You two look like a shop-girl and her boy out for a half-holiday! If the *Daily Mail* photographer were to see you—'The beautiful Cynthia Ide——'"

Cynthia splashed her so that she screamed, and fled to save a silk frock.

"Perhaps it's a little too public," she observed after that victory.

"That's a frightful thought about a Press photographer."

"Oh, he would get a very pretty picture," said John. "Personally I'm enjoying this. And I've no false pride about me."

He enjoyed looking at her there with the rudder lines under her arms and a breeze blowing her hair about, and her flowered frock making a bouquet of colour in the boat. She had laughter in her eyes and this little adventure had made her forget unpleasant episodes of recent history. She was young enough to recover her spirit and to follow a friendly lead to laughter. They laughed like school boy and girl when another crew of boys bore down on them with whirling oars.

"Here we perish!" cried Cynthia, but they escaped the crash by a rudder's length.

Afterwards when the doctor held out his hand to her at the landing-stage she thanked him for this hour of good fun which had blown the cobwebs out of her eyes.

"It's wonderful how you save people from getting bored!" John didn't know the meaning of the word "bored."

"Boredom? In London? Why it's the most romantic place on earth! Aren't we going to the British Museum to-morrow?"

"I hope not," said Cynthia.

But they did go and, by good luck and a little imagination, and some knowledge of history, he peopled it with ghosts for her, and made old stones tell their tales, and led her into ancient civilisations so that she saw their life. It was his way of making love to her, and his own love story can only be told like this in trivial incidents which have no meaning beyond this pleasant comradeship between a man who had a touch of chivalry and that girl who trusted him as she would have done a brother.

Janet joined them when she could and, of course, was with them in the evenings. Long ago she had guessed that John was under the spell of Cynthia's enchantment. Now she knew what hope he had and one night she chaffed him about it before going to bed.

"Cynthia told me last night that you're the best friend any woman in the world could have. I thought you'd like to know!"

She stood there with her hand on his sleeve after giving him a good night kiss and looked at him mischievously.

John laughed and tried to hide his self-consciousness.

"I'm glad she thinks so well of me. But to plagiarise Nurse Cavell: Friendship is not enough."

"Give her time!" said Janet.

He changed the subject to avoid embarrassing discussion and self-revelation. It was perhaps the one thing which he shirked discussing with his sister.

"When does Eric the Fearless come home?"

"To-morrow," said Janet. "I've missed him frightfully, I must confess."

It was John's turn to mock at her.

"Yes, I noticed you were pining. Well, I shall have to buy a pot hat for the wedding. When is it going to be?"

"Not before the autumn."

"Lord!" said John. "That's not far off. The leaves are falling in Chelsea Gardens."

"That's why I can't afford to wait too long," said Janet.

He heard her give a happy kind of laugh as she switched off the electric light and went into her bedroom.

Not before the autumn! . . . He would have to get another housekeeper. It would be quite intolerable to be left alone with Mrs. Meggs. . . . Good for Janet, though. She deserved all the happiness coming to her with that boy. There was no such luck as far as he was concerned—yet awhile.

LVIII

GILBERT BLAKE came in the following evening from that lonely flat where he shirked shutting the bedroom door on himself for another night of sleeplessness, and agonies of self-analysis and self-pity because lip-sticked Lucy had departed from him.

Every quarrel they had had, all those nagging words with which they had spoilt their partnership, the nerve storms, the rages and the tears which at last had led to the breaking of vows, came back to his brain, as he told Janet, with damnable and reiterated detail, and with accusing evidence against himself. His self-conceit had been wounded by his wife's criticism of his plays and novels. His nerves had played the devil with his sense of humour. Sometimes he had thought out horrible things to say to her which he knew would hurt, and then had vowed not to say them, and then had said them. She had never understood his moodiness, his absent-mindedness, his mental absorption in some fantastic and futile plot. She had accused him of being sulky when he was only introspective, and not caring to please her when he was only desperate to make a success of his work to give her all the fun she wanted. It had been a vicious circle drawn round both of them by an evil spell and it had made a hell of married life. The truth was, he said, that no writing-man ought to be allowed to marry. He ought to be registered as unfit for wedlock. He inflicted infernal cruelties on any woman who shared his domestic life. He didn't blame Lucy in the least. He only felt infernally lonely, and sick with himself, and enraged with that man who had cut off with her—a dissolute swine who had hung about her at night clubs and had already been divorced in a dirty case. . . .

So he had revealed himself to Janet again, but now he sat back in a deep chair with his eyes closed while she played the piano and while the doctor whose house was a refuge for his sister's friends in

time of trouble had a look at that day's *Times*, groaned internally at the rising figures of unemployment, read about the war in China without emotional reaction—impossible to make head or tail of it—glanced at the sporting news and wondered when Cynthia would finish those letters which she was writing upstairs.

They had had rather a jolly afternoon together. He had taken her to the Tower of London—the first time she had been—and they had joined a party of American tourists in charge of a Beef-eater and had a most amusing time. After that he had taken her to tea somewhere in Bond Street, where they had talked for an hour about trivialities—the types of people about them, the life of waitresses, the new play at the Haymarket—while he thought how exquisite she looked, and how impossible it was to believe that less than a month ago she had come to his house with a ghost-haunted look on the eve of her wedding that never came off. Well, this play-time of his wouldn't last much longer. He was getting busy again, and anyhow Cynthia was preparing to leave them. Back to the old routine, and perhaps better so, until one day he might ask her to stay with him again.

Janet was restless at the piano. She seemed to be listening now and then to sounds in the street. Twice she went to the window and looked out.

"Won't you play that again?" asked Gilbert Blake. "Debussy, isn't it?"

"*La Cathédrale engloutie*," said Janet. "But I don't think I'll play it again, Smudge. Rather melancholy, don't you think? And I play it so badly."

"Perfectly," said Smudge from the depths of that low arm-chair.

There was the sound of a motor horn in the street, and the grating of studded tyres at the kerbstone outside.

"There's Eric!" said Janet.

Gilbert Blake sat up in his chair with a look of annoyance.

"Oh, Lord! Is our little Adonis back again?"

Janet had slipped out of the room and did not answer that question which revealed the jealousy of a young man who wanted all her sympathy for himself. It was only John who was amused by this egotism and took notice of it.

"Adonis is rather pleased with himself. He has just signed a new contract for a film production of 'David Copperfield.' He ought to be good as David. Just the face for it, don't you think?"

"Easy money!" said Smudge enviously.

Out in the hall there was the sound of Eric's laughter and Janet's voice speaking low. When she brought him into the room there was no doubt in John's mind that she had been kissed by that young lover at the door. There was a look in her eyes that betrayed her, a laughing shyness behind a flutter of eyelashes.

"Hullo!" said Eric.

He was in plus fours and looked bronzed and well and high-spirited. His mother had recovered from her illness. He had taken her away to a little place on the Yorkshire coast. It was the first time really that he had got to know her. They had become very friendly with each other. And even his father was quite civil now that he was making a bit of money. Damned funny that. . . . Well, he was glad to be back in the foul old city again. Now he would have to get down to work once more. Perhaps Janet had told them about "David Copperfield"? He was rather keen on the part. Trousers strapped under the boots—a high collar and waisted coat—rather effective! They had got a marvellous type for Mr. Micawber. The sets were ready in the studio and the company would get going in a day or two. Of course old Braithwaite would work them all to death as usual. The eternal hanging about draughty dressing-rooms. Scrappy meals. . . . Still, it was worth it, on the whole—with a good contract. Things looked different when one got out of the crowd. Inside the crowd it was perfectly hellish. Some of those girls——

He talked a good deal with self-consciousness. He was a different being from that boy who had tried to gas himself and made an inefficient job of it. Every now and then he gave a smiling glance at Janet and was civil to Gilbert Blake though not long ago he had left the house in the sulks to avoid him, with a morbid jealousy. Now there was no need of jealousy. Janet wore that ring with three little pearls.

"I hope Cynthia won't be long," said Janet presently. "I can't think what she's doing up in her room all this time."

"Oh, Lord, yes!" said Eric. "I forgot you had a girl staying

in the house. . . A pretty bad case—that inquest and all the rest of it.”

“We’re trying to make her forget,” said Janet. “John has been rather successful!”

Those last words were spoken with a smile in her brother’s direction, but he ignored them. He hoped she wouldn’t talk to Eric about that subject. It was his holy of holies.

“I think I’ll make the coffee,” said Janet. “Cynthia can’t be long now.”

Cynthia came into the room five minutes later when Eric was telling something about his mother’s illness and the way he had learnt to know her for the first time during her convalescence.

“Sorry!” said Cynthia. “I had a lot of letters to work off.”

She was in a frock of cream-coloured silk, cut square and low, and the gold of her hair shone under the electric light in this low-ceilinged room. She came over towards Janet, and then stopped at the sound of Eric’s voice with a look of surprise at finding this visitor in the room—that boy of whom she had heard a good deal from John in their talks together.

Eric stopped talking, and stood up, and for a moment these two looked at each other with a sudden shyness and self-consciousness. There was a kind of startled look in Eric’s eyes as though he had not expected a girl as pretty as this. And a doctor with watchful eyes and a habit of looking into the minds of people saw Cynthia blush very faintly for a moment after that quick, shy, searching look at Janet’s lover of whom she had heard so much and whom she now met for the first time.

She seemed to like the look of him fairly well and held out her hand in a friendly way.

“You’re Eric, aren’t you? Janet has told me about you.”

“Not too much, I hope,” said Eric, laughing faintly, and looking self-conscious and embarrassed. He was polite, but not at ease, and even faintly hostile. Perhaps this girl revived his prejudice against “flappers,” and their kind. He began to stammer a little when he talked to Janet again until he recovered his self-control. But John noticed that for the rest of the evening he avoided addressing his remarks to Cynthia and only looked at her surreptitiously now and then when she was discussing something

with Gilbert Blake. He left rather early with the plea that he had "a bit of a headache" after motoring down from Yorkshire.

But before he went he gave an invitation to the company, though he addressed it to Janet.

"Would any of you like to see some of the sets of 'David Copperfield'? They're rather amusing. Old London in the time of Dickens, built up in the studio so that it looks the real thing."

"I should love to come," said Janet. "What about you, Cynthia?"

"Am I included in the invitation?" she asked.

"Oh, rather," said Eric without enthusiasm. "Anyone, of course."

That anyone was not altogether complimentary to a pretty lady.

He went out into the hall with Janet who came back when she had said good-bye to him with a look of anxiety.

"I'm sorry about his headache," she said to John. "It's not like him to hurry off so quickly."

John shrugged his shoulders.

"Scorching down the Great North Road. A mile-stone a minute and passing everything! What can you expect with these demon motorists?"

He smiled at Cynthia, who had a passion for speed, but she had not heard his words and was busy with her own thoughts.

LIX

CYNTHIA'S plans were altered by her mother's illness and by her fretfulness. Lady Ide had taken an intense dislike to that nursing-home at Bournemouth, and hated her nurses—whom she accused of being cruel to her—and beyond anything detested the sight of the sea so flat and shining out there beyond the open windows.

"It's so damned dull, dearie," she complained to her husband. "I was born in Brixton and I want a bit of life as long as I'm not dead."

She wanted to hear the noise of London again and the roar of the old buses, and the sound of the streets. That everlasting sea gave her the creeps, she said. Besides she wanted to die in her own house, instead of lying among strangers, as helpless as a sick cat.

She was brought back to Cadogan Square and this home-coming seemed to do her good, especially when Cynthia went back to look after her and to take charge of the housekeeping after a scene with her father who came round to Walpole Street and stayed with her for an hour or more in the doctor's consulting-room. It must have been a painful scene for both of them, and John could only guess at what had passed by Cynthia's emotion when her father left the house, and by the humble and almost abject look of that man whom he met for a moment in the hall.

"Thanks for looking after my little girl, Doctor," he said. "She's coming home to her mother to-night. If I could ever do anything to repay you——"

In John's room Cynthia stood on the verge of tears extremely pale, and for a moment, he thought, a little faint.

"I'm going home," she said. "Mother wants me."

"Yes," said John. "Hard luck on us."

"And father wants me," she said in a low voice.

"Yes," said John.

She turned away from him for a moment and he wondered if she were going to cry, but she mastered herself and spoke with a slight break in her voice.

"He's frightfully sorry for everything. I suppose he didn't mean to be so horrible. . . . Anyhow, I'm going."

"One has to forgive—almost everything," said John.

And that evening when the Rolls-Royce came to fetch her home after Janet had helped her to pack up, she said good-bye to John in her bedroom when he went up to bring her bags down.

"My little sanctuary," she said, glancing round the barely furnished room with a smile of affection and regret. "So much nicer than a big house in Cadogan Square. When I came here that night I was afraid of myself and you and Janet made me feel—safe."

"Come again one day," said John.

He was tempted then to say those things that lay hidden in his mind. He was very much tempted when she came towards him and held up her face to be kissed.

"A million thanks," she said.

He kissed her lightly on the cheek—a brotherly kind of kiss, though something of his soul went into it and he spoke as though it hadn't happened.

"Don't forget I'm a friend, as well as a doctor."

Then he carried down her bags to the hall where Janet embraced her, and where he stood at the door and raised his hand when she stepped into that big car and went away from Walpole Street.

Half an hour later he walked round to a house in his own neighbourhood where an elderly artist lay on a couch in his studio in a state of delirium so that he imagined his wife to be a picture-dealer who had robbed him of his best work.

"Take that man out of the room!" he raved.

A doctor has to put aside his own emotions. He is the servant of his patients. He has to diagnose their troubles and find a clue to the mystery of their minds, and do what he can, which is very little, to relieve their pain, or find some antidote to the poison in their bodies. A girl's kiss, a touch of passion, a thrill of romance, the mating instinct must not excite the pulse of a man who walks into other people's bedrooms where death, sometimes, is waiting

on the door-mat, or fog his eyes when he searches for the secret of some hidden malady, or dull his sympathy for the mental conflicts of these people who call to him for help as a medicine man, believing that he has some magic in his little black bag or the power of working spells upon them when all he has is a slight knowledge of cause and effect in the mechanism of mind and body. Dr. Jevons went back to duty.

HE was quite busy again and one of his cases prevented him from joining Janet and Cynthia in that visit to the film-studio to see David Copperfield's London, though he had wanted to do so. There was a lady in St. Leonard's Terrace—one of those old Georgian houses which pleased his eye more than most others in the neighbourhood—who was inconsiderate enough to imagine the pangs of appendicitis just as he was ready to start. Well, England expects—especially of general practitioners. After that old patients and new began to send for him so that his slack time was over and he had to abstain from social pleasure except at odd hours of which he could never be sure. So he missed a little dinner party given by Eric at the Ritz and some supper dances at the Savoy with that young Cræsus as host, and with Gilbert Blake, or some other man as partner to Cynthia who could hardly be left out as long as she stayed with Janet.

Several times John came home late at night to find three of these people still sitting up round the fire—the nights were getting chilly—talking quietly or working out a cross-word puzzle which was all the rage then or just watching the red glow in the fire-grate with only a word now and then—a pleasant picture which made him regret that he had to be out so much. Cynthia was generally curled up on the hearth-rug with her head against Janet's knees while Eric was in his Puck-like attitude on the fender or a foot-stool, or with his back against the wall and his hands clasped round his knees.

Once when he came upon them like this the doctor was interested by an unusual expression on Cynthia's face. It was touched by the firelight and she was looking at Eric who was sucking an empty pipe and staring down at his evening shoes completely unaware of her interest in him. She seemed to be

watching him intently as though trying to read his character behind that Greek mask of youth. She was utterly absorbed in this study and her eyes were very luminous and trance-like. Or perhaps it was just the effect of that flickering firelight and a mere illusion in the mind of a tired man who had come home late.

"Hullo, you people," he said. "You look as if you were in the garden of the Sleeping Beauty."

Cynthia was the first to spring up with a cry of greeting.

"How late you are—and how tired you must be. I wouldn't be a doctor for anything in the world."

"We've been talking about everything in heaven and earth," said Janet. "Then suddenly we all went into the great silence. Don't they say an angel passes when that happens?"

"Perhaps it was a policeman on his beat," suggested John.

"Nearly midnight!" said Eric. "And I have to be at Cricklewood at nine o'clock to-morrow morning washed and shaved and looking like a little gentleman. *Pas possible!*"

He rose and stretched himself and then raised Janet's hand to his lips.

"Don't forget I expect you both at tea-time to-morrow."

Cynthia put in an objection to that plan.

"I don't think I'll come, Eric. Two's company, three's none. Janet has been self-sacrificing long enough."

He looked at her with raised eyebrows as though surprised by that point of view.

"Just as you like," he answered quietly.

"Rubbish!" cried Janet. "If you don't go I won't go."

She put her arm round Cynthia's waist and held her tight.

"We like you to come with us, don't we, Eric?"

He didn't answer but stood there smiling curiously with his eyes on Cynthia.

"Well, it's very kind of you both," said Cynthia. "I hate to be such a nuisance."

"To-morrow then," said Eric.

Dr. John Jevons did not go to bed when that young man had departed and when Janet and Cynthia had gone up to their rooms. He stood on the hearth-rug with his back to the dying

fire staring at the carpet with a queer idea in his mind. It was an idea that he didn't like at all. If there were any truth in it it would lead to trouble where he had looked for peace.

It was perhaps ten minutes or more before he moved across the room and switched off the light.

"Oh, nonsense," he said in the darkness before going up to bed.

LXI

HE was a lonely man, really, that doctor of ours, though he established more human contacts than most people with a narrow circle of friends. He was alone with his thoughts, mostly, except for Janet, and he had a feeling that he was an onlooker of life rather than inside the game. Perhaps it was his habit of watching people and studying their way of life and trying to get a clue to some hidden conflict of the mind—revealed to him by abnormal symptoms of ill-health—which seemed to isolate him from the little world around him. He stood apart from them mentally, though he had no sense of intellectual superiority, because he was beginning to understand the causes and consequences of their personal distresses. People who sent for him to “put them right” regarded themselves as unique specimens of the human race. They had an unconscious egotism which made them believe that their private lives were unaffected by the outside world or by the type of civilisation in which they lived, or by other people’s ideas and habits. Just as their bodies seemed to them personal and strictly individual so their minds seemed to them self-controlled and self-determined. But to this doctor his patients began to fall into categories and classes. As his practice extended he came to see them not as single cases unrelated to others but as subjects of general laws, and victims of social conditions over which they had but little influence.

It was this city civilisation which was producing most of the maladies which provided his practice. In the slum districts, so close to the dwelling places of the well-endowed, there were the diseases of darkness—rickets, anæmia, tuberculosis—bred in basements and overcrowded tenements, and the diseases of despair due to a sharp-edged poverty and a frightful insecurity of life among people who had only the thinnest margin between self-respect and pauperdom. These women with four children in one

room and another waiting to be born knew the meaning of stark terror if their men fell out of work in a bad season, or if a speculating builder bought up their little houses and by an interior decorating and a splash of paint put them up for sale at fantastic prices. Slum clearance—good!—but where in God's name were these people to go except to crowd more tightly into other slums? "The dole is demoralising England," said the papers. Perfectly true as this doctor agreed, but meanwhile able-bodied men were trudging the streets in a hopeless quest of work, begging at street corners with a box of matches, living on their women-folk, going rotten. There was something wrong somewhere in the second richest city in the world.

The doctor attended some of these women and marvelled at their courage. Some of them were charwomen, who went out in all weathers to clean doorsteps and do the dirty work in lodging-houses between their child-bearing. They went down with pneumonia, rheumatism, kidney troubles, asthma. They were bundles of nerves and harassed by life. They had to get the elder children to school, clean and tidy. They had to cook for a man who came in sullen and wet, and sometimes drunk. They had to share a tap with their neighbours on the same passage. And they had to keep on having children because that is the price of wifehood in the minds of simple-minded men, and perhaps also in a natural way of life not lived in cities where space is scarce and where children are a curse in small rooms and sunless courtyards. No wonder some of these women nagged at their men, and screamed at their children, and kept up shrill, querulous, unending feuds with neighbours across the passage. The wonder was that so many of them were patient and good-natured and endlessly brave—slaving very often for some young hussy of a daughter who went out from these squalid little homes to earn good wages and spend them all on short frocks and silk stockings and the pictures every other evening.

And those young hussies! This doctor attended them for chills caught on the tops of buses in wet weather, for the usual complaints of girlhood herded together in shops and factories, for emotional crises caused by a lack of balance between the sexes, over-stimulated imagination, unfulfilled desires, and highly-

strung nerves fretted by the rush and racket of tube trains and this over-mechanised world about them. He admired them for the vital spirit in them. Their selfishness with those hard-working mothers was self-preservation. How could they stay in those dark little rooms with squalling babies when for one and ninepence they could sit in a dream world looking at the beauty of life and the romance of love with chocolates to suck and a boy who didn't look so bad in the night? Life belonged to them. It was their day out. And didn't they pay for their own clothes and everything they liked to have? . . . Father out of work again? Oh, God! Well, why can't he go on the dole?

They knew how to look after themselves, they told this friendly doctor when he gave them a warning now and then. Hadn't he heard those words from someone else? Yes, Phyllis Dix of Royal Avenue who had been in a class above them.

Some of them went down the same street of adventure as that child and burnt themselves in the fires of passion which was a roaring furnace under their feet, though the pavement seemed so safe, and the voice of romance so enticing when it called them into the parks before the gates were shut. There was no one to warn them except this doctor with the funny eyebrows and a friendly way with him. Their mothers were frightened of them—"they don't take no notice of me, doctor!"—and acknowledged their daughters' right to liberty with their boy friends and their evenings out. Didn't they earn good wages and hadn't they the right to their own lives? Besides there was nothing they didn't know, and they just laughed at hints of danger ahead, and motherly "fussiness," and old-fashioned stuff about don't-do-this and don't-do-that.

So silly all that, to the crowd of young people who had jumped ahead in life to a new era which had no relation with the old world of drudgery and dark fears and thwarted lives. Even in these slum streets there was more adventure, more laughter, less squalor, and many ways of escape for the girls who earned good wages while their fathers were out of work. One couldn't quarrel with the change. It had let fresh air into foul places. It was only a pity that this social transformation was taking place in a civilisation which was ill-balanced, indisciplined, haphazard and

utterly unnatural so that it fretted young nerves, over-stimulated the emotional side of life, and had no contentment.

There were too many of these vital girls and not enough boys. They played with passion, but were thwarted of its natural fulfilment unless they took a chance. It was creating a new and desperate problem, already breaking down the old moralities and causing psychological distresses, which filled the newspapers with reports of suicides, strangled sweethearts, death compacts and crime of passion.

So Dr. Jevons of Walpole Street going his rounds came upon cases which he studied not as isolated and individual problems, but as types of a social state developing these disorders of mind and body. *Civilisation was the disease.* It was putting too great a strain upon the individual and upset the natural balance of life. That was what he was coming to think, as he met more hysterical women, more men on the edge of nervous breakdowns, more unhappy couples in little flats, more childless wives, more neurotic boys, more distressed and bewildered girls, more hidden conflicts in the minds of his patients.

This new civilisation of city life was somehow wrong. It was an unconscious conspiracy against nature which takes its revenge against all enemies. It prevented peace of mind. It was poisoning the souls of its people. It was weakening their resistance to invisible attacks—that influenza germ, cancer, infantile paralysis, new diseases which were beginning to alarm the scientists. It was creating a social life in which people could only obtain momentary satisfaction by the dope of artificial excitement which prevented them from thinking. This speeding up of the old rhythm, this restlessness, was knocking people's nerves to pieces. The pace of the machine was getting too hot—red-hot.

This London with its seven million people was a monstrous mechanism which was utterly divorced from nature. England would have to pay the penalty for that divorce. In the old days when there was a peasant class with the main body of the people having their lives based on the old earth the city was always being recruited from a healthy stock. Its wastage could be repaired from the land. Now there was no peasantry and social life had no roots in mother earth. Spiritually that was bad. English character

had been formed by a people very close to their fields and woods and flowers and trees. Now it was being formed in picture palaces and tube trains, in mannequin parades and night clubs, and between the covers of erotic novels.

"It can't go on like this," said Dr. Jevons, striding down Brompton Road.

Marriage had broken down. He had to admit that. It was being challenged and evaded. This doctor who was called into service flats and neat little houses, newly decorated, looked into the eyes of a young wife—one of the Lucy Blakes of London—and knew her trouble; or went into the study of her husband who said "I'm feeling damned unwell, Doctor," and diagnosed his case. Nerves. Hysteria. Passionate and thwarted instincts. Maladjustment to social life. A breaking of loyalties. Domestic unhappiness. Conflict. The young wife was shirking motherhood. She was afraid—or selfish. The husband had a frayed temper, and was over-strained, and bewildered by his wife's hysteria. He was trying to keep his end up on the financial side of things. He was doing his best perhaps or failing to provide this girl with the things she wanted out of life or thought she wanted. She didn't play the game. She was never satisfied. She hadn't enough to keep her mind off rotten ideas, said this young husband. She resented his endearments. She hated the idea of having a kid . . . It was Gilbert Blake, called Smudge, all over again. And these two people sharing life in a little house, newly decorated, or in a service flat where everything was done for them were unconscious that civilisation was their enemy and that the spirit of the age had come between them and happiness—a spirit of revolt against old loyalties and old moralities, and some faith which would reconcile them with the laws of nature and the need of self-sacrifice for the good of the race or the love of God, as people used to say. In a simpler life, based on the old earth, this man would have been earning his living by the sweat of his brow instead of sitting in a City office with slack muscles and sensitive nerves. That woman would have not shirked motherhood or his endearments. She would have been a sturdy mother of men, wanted in the fields. She would have escaped hysteria and hidden conflicts. She would have told fairy tales to her children by the old

hearthside at night instead of going to the Savoy for a supper dance, or listening to jazz music over the wireless as the next best thing until the boredom of it would make her cry out against the intolerable futility of life. She was just another victim of this new civilisation, this top-heavy monstrosity, this moving machine which was crushing the soul of the world and poisoning the well springs of humanity. One day the whole thing would smash. Nature would see to that.

So it seemed to Dr. John Jevons of Walpole Street, who had once been a ship's doctor and had seen the life of primitive peoples before he had set up practice in London and went about with searching eyes, and a sense of pity, and an idea that he could help people by mind-healing. It was thoughts like that—strange thoughts down the King's Road, Chelsea, or thereabouts—which gave him this sense of being an onlooker of life and rather lonely in his own mind.

LXII

JANET seemed happy in her quiet way as the weeks passed from a hot summer to a wet autumn. She seldom spoke of her own plans but was anxious about John when he would be left without her help as housekeeper. Poor Mrs. Meggs was hopelessly inadequate! He would have to get a good maid. She had heard of a girl from Nina—a Russian girl who had a passion for cleaning and would keep the house as bright as a new pin. Eric proposed taking a flat in Sloane Street—one of those new service flats. The rent was appalling though it didn't seem to frighten the boy now that he was earning such a lot of money. Sometimes she wondered if his good fortune were going to last. Public taste was very fickle. If people got tired of the "pictures" it would be rather awkward for Eric.

He was working very hard, she said, in that production of "David Copperfield." Too hard, she thought. It was making him nervy again, and sometimes when he came to Walpole Street after long hours in the studio he was so tired that she could hardly get a word out of him. That man Braithwaite was an absolute slave-driver. Of course she had a grudge against him for keeping Eric working so late at night. It was quite usual now to get a telegram or a telephone call saying: "Frightfully sorry, can't get away from this menagerie," when she had been counting the minutes to the time when he would give his lively tattoo on the front door or when she could see the headlights of his car gleaming through the window blind.

"It's almost as bad as being a doctor," she told John after one of these disappointments. "He can't call his soul his own, the hours he has to hang about in his dressing-room."

"Don't they pay him for it?" asked John with a touch of irony. "I wish I could earn half the money by hanging about and reading novels, apart from the intolerable boredom."

"That's just it," said Janet. "The poor boy gets bored beyond all patience—and he's smoking himself to death in consequence."

Well, not quite as bad as that. But with a doctor's searching glance John noticed that young Eric was not quite so fit as he had been when he came back from Nice that time. He had become quieter and more thoughtful. He looked worried and moody sometimes as though he had some secret trouble in his mind and his eyes were not quite candid—quick indeed to avoid a straight look from John who wondered why, being very friendly to this boy whom he had come to like so much. Was it self-consciousness, or something the matter with the lad? With Janet he was always charming and devotional, and John liked the way in which he kissed her when other people were present, in a boyish and chivalrous way, without any affectation. Once, coming back after a late call the doctor found him fast asleep, hunched up on the floor with his head against Janet's knees. She had her cheek against his hair, bending over him, and when John came in to a dimly lit room with only one lamp turned up on the piano, put a finger to her lips and smiled.

"Adonis sleeps!"

The boy was over-tired by those long hours in the studio. But that was no reason why he should be so shift-eyed as though he had a guilty conscience, and from a health point of view it was absurd of him to stay up late at night so often instead of getting a decent amount of sleep. He was not satisfied now with a quiet evening in Walpole Street, with Janet and Cynthia and other friends who dropped in. He would suddenly get restless and go to the window and look out and then make his usual suggestion for the relief of boredom.

"Let's go and see a show. What do you say, Janet?"

Janet tried to dissuade him once or twice, but seeing his disappointment and his restlessness pretended that she was keen to see that show, whatever it might be, although she was ready to drop sometimes after a hard day at that hat shop. She could quite understand that he wanted to get a change from that studio. It was not much fun for him just to sit round the fire and talk with Cynthia or Nina, and he was always willing to include them in his

plans for an evening out if they happened to be there. He was pleased to spend the money he was earning and invented excuses for doing so in the grand manner. Even after the theatre he was not satisfied and suggested a dance somewhere. Anything rather than go to bed with the prospect of getting up again and going to that deadly studio. She could understand that. It was exactly like those boys she had known ten years ago in war-time. And she couldn't let him see that she was tired. She must never be tired with this young lover of hers or he would feel the difference in age which she had agreed to forget. She must be ready for the fun of life at any hour of the day or night. And it was great fun really, however tired she was, especially if Cynthia or Nina came to laugh at any little joke, to chatter with Eric, and keep things merry and bright for him. She was glad sometimes to sit out at these supper dances and watch Cynthia and Eric on the floor among the other dancers. They looked wonderful together and people stared at them, she noticed, with open admiration or whispered comments.

"Do you see that boy and girl over there? What a charming couple! Who are they, do you think?"

She could hardly believe even now that Eric was really in love with her and that very soon now she would be his wife. He was so young—so young! But whenever he was dancing he looked over his partner's shoulder to smile at her and he neglected Cynthia shamefully sometimes and had to be teased into dancing with her. It was queer, his behaviour with Cynthia. When he danced with her he was serious and silent, although with Nina he was talkative and kept her laughing. They were quite good friends and Cynthia liked him but they were always a little guarded with each other and there was always that shyness between them. Perhaps it was Cynthia's fault. She watched him as though she were not quite sure about him. She was amused and watchful, but a little doubtful whether he might not turn out to be a Basil Hyde. That is how it struck Janet who knew that secret timidity in Cynthia's mind, about all men except John, in whom she had perfect faith. Well, she was getting over that a little. Janet had helped her by quiet talks now and then. One day she might be reconciled to the idea of marriage. . . . Poor old John! It was

a pity that he had to be left out in the cold so much because of his patients.

Those evenings out came to an end when Eric was kept late at the studio for a week or two on the last scenes of "David Copperfield"—too late even for a visit to Walpole Street, except on Sundays, until one evening when he came in time for dinner unexpectedly. It was hard luck on Janet because she had gone out to cheer up Nina who was ill in bed and very sorry for herself. That little lady had uttered a plaintive cry through the telephone for Janet's company to save her from suicide while temporarily insane with the English climate and a cold in the nose, and Janet as a loyal friend had gone off in a taxi in answer to this S.O.S.

"No chance of Eric coming this evening," she said before going.

He arrived five minutes afterwards, disconcerted when he heard that she had gone out, and rather inclined, John thought, to shirk a dinner with him alone. He sat reading the evening paper, with only an occasional word or two, until Mrs. Meggs brought up a badly cooked meal.

"Not like the Ritz!" observed John apologetically, as he handed over some underdone mutton.

"Good enough for me," said Eric gloomily.

He cheered up a little over a bottle of Pomard—not too bad—and talked about his studio life. There had been a fight in one of the dressing-rooms between a Russian and a Pole. It was over some absurd question of international politics. One of the actresses had had a row with Braithwaite because he had cut one of her best scenes. The fellow who was acting Steerforth was drinking too much and made a fool of himself before the camera men. The picture had gone too far for Braithwaite to give him the sack.

Then conversation languished until John began to talk about Janet and future plans.

"Have you taken that flat yet?"

"They want references," said Eric. "I've referred them to you. No hurry, of course."

"Well, you'll have to furnish the place. That will take some time, won't it?"

Eric seemed to think there was no difficulty about that. "One can buy the stuff in an hour or two. A stroll round Harrod's ought to do the trick."

"It's good furnishing one's first home," said John, glancing round his own room. He had devoted weeks to the decoration of this little house—bargain hunting down the King's Road.

Eric smiled faintly and then left the table to help himself to some stewed fruit.

"Janet will make the best wife in the world," said John. "You're much to be envied, young fellow."

Eric agreed, but shirked sentiment.

"Have some of these tinned pears, won't you?"

John had some tinned pears. It was difficult keeping up a conversation with Adonis. He didn't respond very much, but one couldn't sit silent over a dinner for two—at least it was not in the nature of this doctor who liked an exchange of ideas and tried another subject.

"I read a good novel the other day. The best bit of psychology I've come across for a long time. It might amuse you."

A description of that novel filled in time over a cup of coffee and a cigarette, but Eric, who had seemed to be listening attentively, gave himself away when John asked a sudden question.

"Don't you think the fellow was a fool to behave like that? What would you have done in the same circumstances?"

"Sorry!" said Eric, with a sudden start. "I'm afraid I missed that point."

"And I'm afraid I've been boring you," said John, laughing at this blank ignorance of everything he had been saying. "Let's go into the next room. I daresay Janet will be back fairly early. Have you seen this week's *Punch*?"

Eric was glancing through that week's *Punch*, without seeming to get much fun out of it, when the bell rang.

"There is Janet," said John. "Back earlier than I thought. That's good, because I have to go and see a patient of mine."

But it was Cynthia, who had slipped round from Cadogan Square in an evening frock with a cloak over it.

John opened the door to her and brought her in to his sitting-room, explaining the absence of Janet.

"She's sure to be back before long. And anyhow, here's Adonis ready to entertain you for half an hour."

Eric dropped *Punch* to the floor and stood up with his hands in his pockets.

"We might do a cross-word puzzle," he suggested with an ironical smile.

Cynthia answered his smile but didn't think much of his suggestion.

"You needn't bother about me, Eric. A little sleep might be useful to you. I'll talk to John."

But John broke the news about that patient. He would have to be out for half an hour. Could they amuse themselves together for that length of time?

They looked at each other cautiously and then laughed, and Eric made another bright suggestion.

"We might listen to the wireless. There's to be a lecture on The Science of Sanitation."

"Perhaps Janet will come back and relieve the awful strain," said Cynthia hopefully.

"Well, I'll leave you to make the best of it," said John.

He was amused by this armed neutrality between them. They were still dead shy, though he had an idea that they rather amused each other. Once or twice he had seen Cynthia looking at this boy with a kind of wonderment. It was that film-face of his, almost too good to be true. Perhaps she wanted to find out whether he was as nice as he looked, and wasn't sure.

There was complete silence in the room when the doctor left the house with his little black bag on the way to a house in St. Leonard's Terrace, where he had a patient suffering from some form of neurasthenia. It was a barrister who had made a success at the Bar but found himself shirking his briefs and losing the thread of his arguments in court, and having moments of complete aphasia. He thought it was overwork, but really it was worry about his daughter's engagement. There was some bee in his bonnet about that. It was a father's hatred of a rival to the affections of an only girl. That was a hidden conflict of which he was utterly unaware and which he resented angrily and passion-

ately when this doctor suggested it to him as a cause of his nervous breakdown. . . .

Well, all that took time. It was half-past ten before the doctor was on his way home again. He had left those two rather long unless Janet had come back to prevent them from getting bored with each other. He stopped a moment longer to have a word or two with P.C. Widgery, who was starting on his night beat.

"Chilly night . . . I hate this east wind, don't you?"

"One gets hardened to it—on this job. And I daresay it does you a bit of good, Doctor. Nice for pneumonia, and all that!"

"Oh, I'm busy enough without that. Well, good-night. Keep your eye on the cat burglars."

"Newspaper stuff!" said P.C. Widgery as he raised a gloved hand and faced the wind again.

Two of the Chelsea pensioners were coming home late after an evening out. Their sticks beat on the pavement as they plodded on, a little weak in the knees, a little bent in the back, with the wind blowing their white beards against their medals.

"These young fellers talk about the Great War," said one of them. "Why it was child's play to what I went through in '79!"

"Ah, they never faced the Fuzzy-Wuzzies," said the old man at his side. "I remember——"

His high, cracked voice went down the wind.

In a dark doorway at the bottom of Smith Street a servant-maid was saying good night to her lover, held tight in his arms.

The doctor smiled into the darkness where love sheltered from the east wind—that drab cold cheerless love of the London streets. Perhaps it kept their souls warm. Perhaps that dark doorway was like the gate of paradise.

He wanted to get home before Cynthia left. With luck she might offer him her cheek again as once she had let him kiss her when they said good-bye. He had been thinking things over lately. He was beginning to think that he might give her a hint or two. That inhibition in her mind about marriage was breaking down. Her reconciliation with her father had had something to do with it. His remorse and especially, perhaps, his devotion to a stricken wife had weakened her secret dread of him and those

fears which were associated in her mind with married life. So it seemed from things she had said one night to Janet. . . .

But there was another reason for a change in her. Betty Truslove, who was now Betty Thistledown, was going to have a baby, and Cynthia had bought some tiny clothes for it. She had shown them to Janet and then had burst into tears, because of some emotional storm in the very depths of her unconscious mind. It was the instinct of motherhood breaking through all barriers of repression.

Perhaps after all when Janet married her Adonis a doctor in Walpole Street needn't be so lonely as he had sometimes feared. . . . How beautiful she had looked to-night when she had dropped her cloak from her shoulders and stood up straight and slim in that slip of a frock with her arms and shoulders bare. His daffodil lady! . . . Was his imagination playing tricks with him? Wasn't it absurd for a man of his profession to indulge in auto-suggestion like this? Or might he claim some of the luck of life, like London lovers at the gate of paradise? As a married man he wouldn't make such a dead failure as some of these young neurasthenics. He would keep a watch on his nerves. He would ask Cynthia to help him with his work. He would see that she had plenty to think about. He would be devotional. There would be loyalty between them and a faith in the same ideals of service. They might find some clue to the mystery of this great bewilderment called life. They would get back to simplicity, and he would drive her out to good places where they could smell the old earth again and be with flowers. She was like a flower herself, with that lovely colour of hers. A tall daffodil . . . It was astonishing how much a man may think between one street and another, and while opening his own door with a latchkey chained to his trouser button on the right-hand side. Dr. Jevons thought all that and more than that between St. Leonard's Terrace and Walpole Street.

Janet's umbrella was not in the hallstand. Not back yet? Cynthia and Eric were still there. He could hear their voices through the open door of the sitting-room where he had left them.

He heard what Cynthia said.

"Eric, we daren't! Oh, my dear—we daren't!"

"It's best to be honest," said Eric. "It's no usefunking it."

John went into the room. He had a vague feeling of distress—strange and painful uneasiness, though why he didn't know.

Cynthia and Eric were standing close together. They were very white. They were holding hands like two people facing death together—two people on the edge of a precipice holding hands.

"Hullo, you two!" said John, in a curiously natural voice, as though he were not shaken by any fear. "What has happened?"

They did not unlink hands. They stood there like Paolo and Francesca—this doctor thought—extraordinarily beautiful—he thought—but somehow tragic.

"Something terrible has happened," said Cynthia in a low voice.

"Terrible?" asked John in that quiet natural voice. "In what way?"

"Oh, John!" said Cynthia. "We're frightened. It caught hold of us in spite of ourselves. We saw it in each other's eyes. It was as though we had always known."

John looked away from her because her beauty—a kind of mystical light on her face—startled him with a sense of pain.

"I don't understand," he said.

"The fact is," said Eric, "that Cynthia and I have found out that we love each other—beyond all words."

A doctor who knew the workings of the human body felt his heart give a lurch, but he was still quite calm when he spoke—amazingly calm, in spite of a sense of anguish.

"That's rather a pity—for Janet, I mean."

"It happened really when we first saw each other," said Eric. "It was that night I came back from Yorkshire—do you remember? We looked at each other and something seemed to—hit us! One can't explain, really. It was just as though a spark had flashed—between Cynthia and me. A sort of revelation, if you know what I mean."

"We daren't tell Janet," said Cynthia. "She mustn't know."

Eric looked at John with a kind of appeal. He was no longer shifty-eyed.

"It seems like treachery. But I shall have to tell her. Don't

you agree? One can't hide this sort of thing. Besides it's inevitable—and all that—now that we know. Of course I owe everything in the world to Janet——”

His voice broke for a moment at the thought of Janet who had mothered him when he was weak and ill and wretched. This new love—this different kind of love—had not altered his devotion to her. Perhaps that was in his mind.

John was tempted by the devil for a moment. A dark rage was creeping into his mind. He wanted just for a moment to say harsh and brutal things to this boy whom he had saved from death one night and taken into his house. He had made love to Janet and asked her to marry him. Did he think he was going to break her heart and get away with it after a light word or two? So sorry and all that! Now he had used his pretty face to steal Cynthia—his pretty film-face which was too good to be true. Someone ought to spoil that Greek profile of his . . .

He did not say those things. They were only the thoughts that came up from the underworld of his mind, from those dark pits of instinct which the cave-men dug in the beginning of our racial life. Consciously his mind flogged them back and mastered them.

And he remembered now. He had known from the very beginning. He had seen that first look between this boy and girl and his mind had interpreted it instantly. But just as quickly he had buried his knowledge, like a dog buries a bone, like every human mind buries thoughts which are unpleasant to its self-conceit or its passionate illusions. At the very time when he was indulging in day-dreams about Cynthia—two minutes ago before coming home—he had known somewhere deep down in him—in that hole where he had buried his thought—that if ever she became his wife it would be because he had taken her away from this boy who was her natural and inevitable lover, forced into loyalty with Janet because of his promise and pledge. How astounding and humiliating that was! How deceitful was the human mind! And how tragic those young lovers looked, standing there hand in hand, frightened of this love that had come to them, remorseful, hating to break their loyalty to Janet, poor dears. That boy had only loved Janet because she had mothered him. He had been liberated when his own mother had come back to

him. Then he had found his real mate. John had known that too, though he had hidden it with that other thought, for Janet's sake. Intellectually he had been afraid of the truth because he hated it.

"You can't help yourselves," he said. "You will have to tell Janet. The truth is always best, don't you think?"

"It's robbing her of Eric," said Cynthia. "Oh, I feel like a thief! It mustn't happen. It's utterly—disloyal."

She spoke that last word as though she hated it and then she raised her head, listening to a sound in the hall which seemed to frighten her. It was the noise of Janet's latchkey in the lock, before she came into the hall and shut the door and then gave a cheery call.

"Hullo! . . . You there, John?"

"Here," answered John.

She came into the room a moment later.

"Sorry to be so late. Nina——"

Then she saw Eric and Cynthia standing there, close together with clasped hands, guilty looking, and afraid.

For a moment her face was eager and smiling, but then she seemed to see that something had happened, something perhaps she had expected or known, though she had hidden it from herself. She became as white as they were, and seemed a little faint for a moment, until she held the back of a chair.

"You needn't tell me," she said. "It's quite all right . . . You needn't look so—dismal about it!"

Eric left Cynthia's side, and bent down to take Janet's hands, and kissed them before he spoke in an abject voice.

"Oh, Janet! . . . I shall never forget . . . I'm frightfully sorry——"

Cynthia flung her arm round Janet's neck.

"I won't take him away from you!" she cried. "I won't let him leave you, Janet!"

It was only Janet who stood there without tears, with smiling lips, refusing to be weak.

"Hush!" she said. "Hush! You needn't worry about me. I'm much too old for Eric. I just mothered him a little. He's all yours, Cynthia, my dear . . . You two are just right for each other . . . Somehow I knew."

She spoke bravely. She was less brave that night, inside her bedroom with the light turned out, when John listened outside her door and then went to his own room and took his boots off and paced up and down in his socks. They had both been hurt rather badly—he and Janet . . . Knocked edgewise . . .

He was asleep on the bed in his shirt and trousers when there was a tap at the door.

It was Janet who called out.

"There's the telephone, John !"

It was ringing downstairs because he had forgotten to switch it to his bedroom. But he held the receiver to his ear and said, "Hullo! Dr. Jevons speaking."

"Oh, Doctor, could you come round at once? My wife has been taken ill again. This is Wainwright, you know."

"Ten minutes," said John.

Where the devil had he put his boots? . . . On the washstand. Silly that! It was lucky being half-dressed though. That poor woman had probably had another hæmorrhage. A nice fellow, that man Wainwright. It was a pity people didn't buy his pictures. Quite talented . . . Where was his front stud? . . . Under the bed, of course. They had a fatal habit of getting under the bed, these studs . . . Lord! two o'clock. Something had happened a long time ago—something emotional and distressing. Oh, yes, Cynthia and Eric . . . and Janet . . . and the end of a dream . . . and a bit of a headache . . . Cigarettes . . . Matches . . . A whiff of nicotine was always a temptation when he was called up like this.

Janet was outside the door in her dressing-gown.

"Would you like some cocoa when you come back, John? It's a cold night. I'll leave it on the stove."

"Thanks," said John. "Don't stay up, though."

He put out his cheek to be kissed. It was nice having a sister like this.

"Oh, John ! . . . The second time !"

She gave a little cry and then stifled it.

"I know," said John, and held her a moment against his shoulder.

There was a cold wind blowing down Walpole Street as the

doctor walked against it with his little black bag. Three doors down a girl had just come home in a taxi and was fumbling for her fare while the wind blew her frock against her legs. Too late for a girl due at a city office next morning at half-past nine. No wonder some of these long-legged ladies had nerves now and then. . . . There were some night birds round the coffee stall in Sloane Square, and two belated lovers in the doorway of the chemist's shop. Otherwise the soul of London seemed asleep. Not really! Behind those closed blinds some people would be tossing wakefully, in some agony of mind or body, longing for next day's light, or afraid of it, until they fell into a restless sleep of dreams. There would be queer dreams to-night among these sleepers in this fever-stricken city. The secret impulses of the mind would be liberated or repressed fears come out of their hiding-places. Some of them would go wandering through fantastic adventures of the spirit from which they would waken again to grey realities.

Passion lurked in some of those little houses behind closed doors—that merciless instinct called love which led sometimes to the gates of paradise and sometimes to a self-made hell. How strange that the very cause of life, the most vital impulse, the divinely sanctioned fusion of body and spirit, should lead so often to tears and tragedy! It was the secret conflict behind many of those darkened windows, where unhappy wives lay restless beside their husbands; where women like Janet wept because of loneliness; where some little Phyllis Dix of life—somewhere in London to-night—would escape from passion by stopping her heart-beat. Sex was the mother of hysteria in a civilisation which had created innumerable disharmonies between the body and the mind, among people who were over-sensitive and overstrained. And yet without this passion there would be no beauty, no joy, and no life. How could one get the balance between its good and evil, its spiritual fulfilment and its thwarted impulses, its loyalties and treacheries? The balance of life had been upset somehow. The old controls had weakened. There was no faith in self-sacrifice or future compensations for earthly suffering. There was a fierce demand for happiness here and now, lest all should be lost.

What could one do about it? How could one restore that lost

balance to life? Was there any antitoxin to the disease of civilisation? . . .

"One can always get on with one's job," said a doctor who had these thoughts in his head and a little black bag in his hand and an emptiness in his heart—for a week or two.

It was a job worth doing perhaps. He could be a little helpful now and then with service and sympathy. If he couldn't cure people he could help them to cure themselves. He believed in faith rather than physic. He believed that if he could get their minds right he could get their bodies right, six times out of ten, or thereabouts. He wanted to get his own mind right, by more knowledge of this bewilderment called life and of the divine mystery behind it.

He is very well known down King's Road, Chelsea—that doctor with the funny eyebrows and the face of a naval officer—or a priest—and a friendly smile at the human tide which passes down that highway. He bought a "pot" hat for the marriage of Eric and Cynthia—that radiant pair!—for whom a crowd waited outside St. Peter's, Eaton Square. They had been patients of his.

THE END

Messrs. HUTCHINSON & Co.

have pleasure in giving the following brief notices of many important new books of serious interest for the Autumn, 1929.

Messrs. Hutchinson's List of NEW NOVELS includes the most recent works of nearly all the leading Authors of to-day, and whose names are given below.

GILBERT FRANKAU
REBECCA WEST
EDGAR WALLACE
RAFAEL SABATINI
ETHEL M. DELL
W. B. MAXWELL
THE BARONESS ORCZY
KAREL CAPEK
OWEN RUTTER
KATHARINE NEWLIN BURT
ANDREW SOUTAR
E. W. SAVI
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H. A. VACHELL
H. de VERE STACPOOLE
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Autumn 1929

Important New 7/6 Novels

Babes in the Wood

by MICHAEL ARLEN

Author of "Lily Christine," "Young Men in Love," etc.

The publication of *Lily Christine* was one of the phenomenal successes of the spring. With it Michael Arlen achieved the impossible—that of enhancing his own reputation! This latest volume from his pen contains five long stories. Each is a brilliant study of modern life: penetrating, epigrammatic and vastly entertaining.

In the Course of Years

by UNA L. SILBERRAD

Author of "The Book of Sanchia Stapleton," etc.

This book is divided into three parts; in the first, we are shown the happy home life of a middle-class family—the sons and daughters of an impecunious professor—in the beginning years of this century; in the second, we are given a picture of the same family in the middle year of the War; whilst in the third, we are shown those of them, now grown to middle age, who survived the four years of hostilities. Those who have already read the novels of Miss Silberrad will know something of the sympathy, deep sincerity and understanding which render them not only intensely interesting, but stimulating as well.

The Girl of the Golden Reef

A story of the Blue Lagoon

by H. de VERE STACPOOLE

Author of "The Blue Lagoon," etc.

A French critic has said that Mr. de Vere Stacpoole is the only writer capable of bringing to his readers the scent as well as the sound of the Tropic Sea. Mr. Stacpoole's amazing versatility and wealth of imagination have rarely been turned to greater account than in this, his latest novel, which again proves that the next best thing to visiting the South Seas is to read Mr. Stacpoole's colourful yarns.

Gather the Stars

by DIANA PATRICK

Author of "Family Group," etc.

Laurel Guest at thirty-seven was still beautiful, but had slipped almost unawares into the years which seemed but the prelude to the inevitably advancing monotony of middle age. Circumstances took her to a remote place near the Irish coast, and there, while staying in a house of mysterious and sinister character, she enters once more the colourful and glamorous country of youth, and recaptures in the dreams of young Jeremy Lenox ideals and sentiments she had judged to be lost. . .

Silence

by ANDREW SOUTAR

Author of "The House of Corbeen," "Silent Thunder," etc.

HUTCHINSON

General Novels 7/6

The Romantic Prince by *RAFAEL SABATINI*

Author of "The Hounds of God," "Scaramouche," etc.

An enthralling romance of love and chivalry in the picaresque days of conflict between Burgundy and France. Count Anthony—"the Romantic Prince"—is one of the most memorable figures in the brilliant gallery of historical portraiture which Rafael Sabatini has yet given us.

Himself and Mr. Raikes by *W. B. MAXWELL*

Author of "We Forget Because We Must," etc.

This, the latest of Mr. Maxwell's studies of human nature, deals with the story of a gifted but highly sensitive young man. The desire for better things, distrust of self, and a determination that nobody shall discover his weakness—these things control his mind and modify his actions in every adventure of life, whether relating to love, business affairs, or family duty. He is enormously successful both in the material and the spiritual realm. Three different women affect his outlook on life.

Young Apollo by *ANTHONY GIBBS*

Author of "Enter—A Greek," etc.

Young Apollo is the story of Christopher Allan Shepherd: how he was a dreamer who went to Oxford and fell in love, and married, and so on. It is the story, too, of Jane Andersen who was a nymph and yet a scientist; an aloof lady of subtle character whom Allan married but never quite came to understand. But most of all it tells of four young people thrown together by the chance tides of life who meet at Oxford and declare together their ideals and aspirations.

Sketch of a Sinner by *FRANK SWINNERTON*

Author of "Nocturne," "A Brood of Ducklings," etc.

This is a love story. There are only five characters, and two of these, although they play important parts in the drama, are subsidiary to the three principals. The "Sinner" of the title is the heroine Lydia Rowe, upon whose personality the interest of the tale largely depends; and the scenes are laid in London and a French sea-coast resort. Tragedy and comedy are intermingled and the book which begins very quietly by picturing a calm domestic interior works, steadily up to a vivid and poignant climax.

The Seven Houses by *JOSEPH DELMONT*

Author of "In Chains" (6th thous.)

A new powerful story by the author who was made famous to English readers by *In Chains*—one of the most successful novels of last spring.

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General Novels 7/6

A New Novel

by GEOFFREY MOSS

Here we have the famous author of *Sweet Pepper, New Wine*, etc., at his best.

Money and Other Stories by KAREL CAPEK

With a Foreword by JOHN GALSWORTHY

"Karel Capek is best known to us English as the forceful and original author of *R.U.R.* and *The Insect Play*, and for a diverting book of gently satirical impressions of English people and places. But, though young, he has already behind him a considerable body of work, and has earned an enviable reputation in Europe and America. He has a searching mind, a detached and lively fancy, and a real gift of expression. He is of the company that counts. I have been asked to contribute a preface to this, his first book of short stories in the English language. But good wine needs no bush, and good stories no preface; all I am going to say is that I read them with very lively interest—they are penetrating, they are unusual, they have power, and they have flavour."—*from the Foreword.*

Son of the Gods

by REX BEACH

Author of "Don Careless," "The Mating Call," etc.

He was a prince and a millionaire—and so he met white people. But he found that the beautiful girl he loved wanted only the success his money could buy. And for that success it seemed that the only price she was unwilling to pay was marriage to a Chinaman. Mr. Beach, great teller of tales, has told here an amazing story of race prejudice, a story filled with surprises. The relationship between the young prince and his philosopher-father is set down with great beauty, and the climax of the book comes when the young man and the old perform in a dim Chinatown room the sacred rites of China's immemorial religion.

Dark Dream by FAVELL MILES (*Lady MILES*)

Author of "Love's Cousin," etc.

The story of Theodore Blount, elder daughter of a country clergyman, a girl of vivid imagination and idealistic temperament, and her revolt against her own ugliness and the drab poverty and dullness of her life. In the real world she is ugly, inarticulate and unattractive, but in her dream world—first shown to her by her old Celtic nurse—she is lovely, attractive, and the possessor of all the beauty and love she desires.

A New Novel

by HELEN PROTHERO LEWIS

By the popular author of "Henrietta," etc.

HUTCHINSON

General Novels 7/6

Dance, Little Gentleman! by GILBERT FRANKAU

It is nearly two years since Mr. Frankau's last novel was published. His new one, *Dance, Little Gentleman!* may be a surprise, but will not be a disappointment to his million readers.

Harriet Hume by REBECCA WEST

Author of "The Judge," etc.

A new novel by this famous writer.

The Valley of Enchantment by KATHLYN RHODES

Author of "East o' the Sun," "The Golden Journey," etc.

The scene of Miss Kathlyn Rhodes' new story is laid in a desert valley in Upper Egypt, where excavations into the newly-discovered Tomb of an ancient King are being carried on. The prophecies of a sand-diviner concerning a snake, a mysterious shot in the night and a thunderbolt hurled by the gods, are all fulfilled. Finally, the Tombs are resealed, and the valley left, temporarily, to its age-old repose by the waters of the Nile. . .

Virgin by H. A. VACHELL

Author of "Quinneys," etc.

The record of certain passages in the life of a young lady who found herself alone and nearly penniless in a world of which she knew nothing. From these ingredients Mr. Vachell weaves a story with that skill and understanding which has helped to make him one of the foremost authors of his day.

The Young Lady from Hell by ARTHUR WEIGALL

Author of "The Not Impossible She," etc.

Her father asked to be buried lying on his face, because, he said, he was sure she would do something to make him turn in his grave. As a matter of fact she was not really bad at all—she was only wayward; and when, by a curious set of circumstances, she found that people were thinking of her as being positively possessed of the devil, she just let them go on thinking so. Her name was William, and she came from County Down; but she appeared to be on her way to a warmer spot, and was expected to depart thither at any moment in a puff of sulphur.

HUTCHINSON

General Novels 7/6

The Altar of Honour

by *ETHEL M. DELL*

Author of "The Unknown Quantity," "Bars of Iron" (721st Thous.), etc.

A lonely girl who, in order to escape from the cruel domination of her half-sister, accepts in marriage the heir to an ancient and honoured title. On the eve of her wedding the adored hero of her younger days returns, yet her complete submission to the will of others renders it impossible for her to avoid the overwhelming consequences. It is only when a human sacrifice is laid upon the Altar of Honour that there comes to her at last the blessings of Peace.

Crashed

by *E. W. SAVI*

Author of "The Maker of Dreams," etc.

This story tells how a millionaire who had spent the best years of his youth in piling up a great fortune at the expense of human relationship, discovers at the summit of his ambitions that his wealth is Dead Sea Fruit; that he has dropped the substance for the shadow. Just when he believes it possible to recover his loss, he meets with disaster—not financial—and has to learn through many vicissitudes the just value of things.

We That Are Left

by *ISABEL C. CLARKE*

Author of "Strangers of Rome," etc.

A post-war story of a family whose two brilliant elder sons have been killed in the war. Two daughters survive, and the younger son whose nervous system has been shattered by an air-raid in childhood. Neglected by his somewhat thriftless parents, his one friend is his sister Allison, the heroine of the book. The reactions of the brother and sister to the stern domination of the latter's husband and the gradual disciplining of Aubrey are graphically related.

Moslem Jane

by *NORMA LORIMER*

Author of "The End of the Matter," etc.

Bennett Fortescue was engaged to a typical and unemotional English maiden whose charms were not sufficient to prevent her temperamental swain from falling before the vivacious Moslem Jane, and it is the tangle of these three young people's love affairs and of Gladys' father, a business man who only finds youth on the threshold of age, that form the theme of the story. The scene unfolds itself on the "Enchanted Isle" of Cyprus and with such delightful ingredients Miss Lorimer has written a novel which should achieve a very wide popularity.

This Way To Fortune

by *GEORGE WODEN*

Author of "The Great Cornelius," etc.

An attractive genre study by an author whose early novel *Little Houses* was acclaimed as "one of the most delightful stories."

HUTCHINSON

General Novels 7/6

Sir Joseph's Guests *by* EMMELINE MORRISON

Author of "Grey and Gold" (6th Thous.), etc.

The many readers of Emmeline Morrison's popular novel *Light Fingers* will welcome the reappearance of "The Hunter" under his own name, Jeremy Holwood. Jeremy—the curious mixture of gentleman and professional jewel thief—returns to England after four years' absence, and, together with Flora Mary Willoughby, becomes involved once more in difficult situations which only his ready wit and resource enable him to overcome.

Lucky Star *by* OWEN RUTTER

Author of "Chandu" (9th thousand), etc.

Owen Rutter's latest novel is a wild and joyous extravaganza concerning the astonishing fate that overtook the village of Upper Shrimpton, which, by a mysterious convulsion of nature, became a tiny world of its own. The story of its adventures is told in a vein half of fantasy, half of satire, and through it moves the figure of Mr. Harold Drake, the little postmaster with the soul of an explorer, to whom Upper Shrimpton came to turn in the time of its extremity.

Strange Enchantment *by* PEGGY WEBLING

Author of "The Fruitless Orchard," "Anna Maria," etc.

Strange Enchantment, although dealing with a subject as old as the hills, is as fresh and as charming as the spring flowers that grow upon them. Entwined with the picturesque theme of fairy-lore, is the up-to-date story of a young woman journalist, Frances Orme, and of the experiences which befall her after meeting Eustace Brail. The adventure of their love and tragedy fills the book, for the author has given us full-length portraits, together with humorous sketches of minor characters, all of whom live with unusual animation.

Ladies First: *Volume of Stories* *by* RICHMAL CROMPTON

Author of "Mist, and Other Stories," etc.

Richmal Crompton is one of the foremost writers of what, for the sake of a better phrase, we may term "domestic fiction"; his characters we can recognise as our acquaintances, and, if we are bold enough, as ourselves. Their troubles and joys are ours. We feel we can understand them and appreciate them. This volume contains a number of short stories, each one a gem of its kind, full of quiet philosophy and a gentle humour.

HUTCHINSON

General Novels 7/6

Moon Music

by *MARIE BJELKE PETERSEN*

Author of "Moon Minstrel," etc.

Silent Thunder

by *ANDREW SOUTAR*

Author of "The House of Corbeen," etc.

A young doctor who has made a "mistake" in England is kicking his heels in Singapore—down and out and content to drift with the tide. "The Whites" have no use for him: the natives regard him with contempt. A beautiful young woman visits his settlement, meets with an accident, and is attended by the derelict because no other doctor is available. Thus Mr. Soutar plunges his readers into a situation dramatic, intense and vital.

Eve the Enemy

by *E. TICKNER EDWARDES*

Author of "The Sunset Bride," etc.

Mr. Edwardes, who has lived for many years in the quiet villages of Sussex, is a shrewd yet kindly observer, and in *Eve the Enemy* he recounts the story of South Down village life—its joys, disappointments and sorrows, its aspirations and loves, with deft touches of humour and pathos. Mr. Edwardes weaves a story which, for originality and charm, is quite the best he has given us.

A Man of Manners

by *PHILIP HUGHES*

Author of "Together" (11th edition), etc.

As Mr. Philip Hughes has spent three years in writing and re-writing this book, it is not surprising that the result is an altogether polished and meticulous piece of work. It presents a character true to life but new to fiction—the good-looking man, exquisitely dressed, exquisitely mannered, and exquisitely dishonest. The story of his wife's devotion; of her gradual disillusionment; and of her final break for freedom, is told with great skill.

The Splash of a Wave

by *SIMON DARE*

Author of "A Beggar-man Came," etc.

Sadly handicapped by impoverishment, and with an unsympathetic father, Lallie and Naomi Marsh found that, even in the seclusion of their peaceful Sussex home, life was a hard business filled with perplexing thoughts, and with difficulties to be overcome. Aided, however, by their hopes and dreams, and Lallie by her violin, they managed to enjoy a dull enough "existence." But in the course of time there came to them, from the least expected source, new influences which were, after sadness and tragedy, to fill their days with radiance

HUTCHINSON

General Novels 7/6

The Cup and the Lip *by M. P. WILLCOCKS*

Author of "Delicate Dilemmas," etc.

Set in Cornwall, Spain, Soho, Brittany, and the Midlands, this novel deals with one of the great questions of to-day—spiritualism; not, however, the spiritualism of the seance room, but rather that open access to the Unseen wherein the Sensitive, in some mysterious way, contacts intangible and invisible influences.

The Fairway *by IRIS WEDGWOOD (Lady Wedgwood)*

Author of "Perilous Seas," etc.

A finely drawn novel concerning almost entirely the fortunes of two men and two women—Billie, Philip, Ann and Coralie, who are characters of widely divergent nature. *The Fairway* should enhance still further the enviable reputation which Lady Wedgwood has made for herself by her thought-provoking novels.

Find the Lady! *by DOUGLAS WALSH*

Author of "The Man Behind the Curtain," etc.

The original story of a social experiment; a theme of great possibilities, which Mr. Walshe has utilised with all success. *Find the Lady* is an intriguing story of real merit.

The Drama in the Desert *by LOUIS VINCENT*

Author of "Spotlight," etc.

The Drama in the Desert is a stirring tale of love and adventure. Two men travelling together through the desert discover that they love the same girl. Passions run high . . . and only one of them returns to England. Suspicions are aroused, and it is only after weeks of misunderstanding and misery that the mystery is cleared up to the happiness of all.

The Second-best Wife *by ANN STOKES*

Florence Alloway, aged nineteen and a student at an up-to-date school of journalism, marries Stephen Vining, a commercial artist. Her people, with a modern respect for the individual will, do not oppose the marriage, although Stephen has divorced his first wife. It is the "laying" of the lovely ghost of Margaret that shatters Florence's last illusion that Stephen has need of her.

Follow Elizabeth *by DOROTHEA CONYERS*

Author of "The Strayings of Sandy" (84th thous.), "Bobbie," etc.

In this tale you will follow with admiration and with smiles the plucky exploits of Elizabeth in her attempt to clear her father's debts; the adventures which befall her will intrigue; the mystery of the stolen chalices will perplex; and, finally, the realisation of a charming romance will captivate you.

HUTCHINSON

General Novels 7/6

Jean and Jeannette

by "RITA" (MRS. DESMOND HUMPHREYS)

Author of "The Wand'ring Darling," etc.

Whilst *Jean and Jeannette* concludes the trilogy (so aptly described as her "Victorian Saga") commenced by "Rita" in *The Grandmothers* and continued in *The Wand'ring Darling*, it is nevertheless a story that can as well be read by itself as in conjunction with its two companions. As a sympathetic and penetrating study of girlhood striving against the difficulties of youth, the gradual blossoming into womanhood and a serener outlook upon life, they enhance the author's already wide reputation in the world of books.

A New Novel

by ETHEL BOILEAU

Author of "Hippy Buchan" (8th thous.), etc.

Adventure Novels 7/6

To an Eastern Throne by ACHMED ABDULLAH

Author of "Ruth and Peter," etc.

A gay and exciting tale of youthful love and adventure in Central Asia. It has a unique background of intimate knowledge of these strange, colourful lands and passionate folk, of unknown secret societies of India, of the real tortuous intrigue of an Asian court.

Gup Bahadur

by TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "Queen Cleopatra," etc.

The theme of this stirring novel is a strong man's fight for self-dominion with every imaginable obstacle arrayed against him. "Gup" McLeod, who has done his bit in Flanders, finds himself after the war foot-loose in India and possessed by a helpless, hopeless rage against false ideals and the misuse of the patriotic spirit for unpatriotic purposes.

Love or a Crown

by RICHARD DERRICK

A mysterious island in the Ionian sea—an island such as Jules Verne might have imagined: a beautiful Princess as the pivot of a desperate attempt to recover a throne; and a peerless English heiress who contends with the Princess for the hand of a soldier of fortune. These form the background of a stirring story in which the interest never flags.

HUTCHINSON

Adventure Novels 7/6

The Men of Moon Mountain

by *KATHARINE NEWLIN BURT*

The story of a savage mountain-lover who attempts to hold back the advance guard of democracy's invasion, by the well-known author of *The Grey Parrot*, etc.

Two Men's Tale

by *ELIZABETH MARC*

The story of two men—the very antithesis of one another, whom that inexorable juggler Fate throws much in each other's company. It is a book to read; for the adventure of it will thrill you, and the significance of it—although perhaps perplexing—will intrigue you.

Detective & Mystery Novels 7/6

The Green Ribbon

by *EDGAR WALLACE*

Author of "The Twister," etc.

A long thrilling novel by this master of dramatic situations. No storyteller of to-day enjoys a greater popularity than does Edgar Wallace, and readers may rest assured that his new story contains, in full degree, those qualities which have earned him such a world-wide reputation.

Through the Eyes of the Judge

by *BRUCE GRAEME*

Author of "Hate Ship," etc.

This novel concerns a murder-mystery treated in an entirely original fashion. It opens, continues and concludes in court during the trial of Patrick Spencer, who is charged with the murder of Bourne. Although, on the first page, the reader is aware of the identity of the accused murderer, the author has handled his characters with such consummate art that the reader is held spell-bound.

The Silent Cracksman

by *JOHN JAY CHICHESTER*

Author of "The Bigamist," etc.

It was an amazing series of adventures through which Maxwell Sanderson, master of a thousand disguises, took his friend and accomplice, Barton Clark. Time and again his agile brain saved them from capture when chance had turned against them. . . . For those who prefer detective stories in which brains are used instead of strong-arm methods, this novel is certainly recommended.

HUTCHINSON

Detective & Mystery Novels 7/6

Seven Hells

by COLLIN BROOKS

Author of "The Catspaws," etc.

Another exciting story of a mysterious disappearance and its consequences, by an author who has established himself as a novelist of first-rate detective and mystery stories.

The Room with the Iron Shutters

by ANTHONY WYNNE

Author of "The Fourth Finger," etc.

The iron shutters of Lord Gerald Glen's study were closed. The windows behind the shutters were bolted. The door was closed. Lord Gerald lay on the floor, stabbed through the heart. . . . How had the murderer entered? How had he escaped? And why had Lord Gerald remained in the room awaiting the assault which, on his own showing, he expected?

The Devil and the Deep Sea

by ELIZABETH JORDAN

Author of "Miss Nobody from Nowhere," etc.

The Devil and the Deep Sea tells of a household of strangely assorted people who are living together for six months by reason of the extraordinary terms of their dead kinswoman's will. They find themselves put on a kind of probation under the watchful eyes of the dead woman's lawyer and her trained nurse. Every member of the unwilling household suspects some other of having murdered the old lady for her money. To remain together, under the circumstances, is horrible; to depart is impossible.

The Man in the Pig Mask

by C. THURLEY STONEHAM

A thrilling mystery story by a new writer.

The Wye Valley Mystery

by ESSEX SMITH

Author of "Wind's in the South," etc.

Who was responsible for the disappearance of Rosalind Crosse? The river was dragged; bloodhounds were used but without avail; and suspicion, sooner or later, fell upon nearly everyone in the village—on the Rector, the Welsh bone-setter, the gipsy herbalist, on Isabel herself, and most of all, perhaps, on old Mr. Rogers, the ex-missionary from China. No one dreamed of the curious part a rare fern was to play in the ultimate solution of the mystery.

A New Novel

by HUGH CLEVELY

Author of "Fraser Butts In" (2nd Edition,) etc.

HUTCHINSON

Detective & Mystery Novels 7/6

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Blackshirt Again

by BRUCE GRAEME

Author of "Blackshirt," "Hate Ship," etc.

There is not a chapter in this novel which is not replete with drama, not a character which does not seem to live. Moreover, with regard to the plot, we can only say that the ending will hold a surprise for the astutest reader.

The Unknown Goddess

by AUSTIN PHILIPS

Author of "The Man in the Night Mail Train," etc.

A romance . . . a mystery-story of the G.P.O., by an author who himself was literally born and bred in that great Service . . . a novel full of dramatic happenings and sustained interest and, above all, of intimate and accurate (though never over-loaded) details of Post Office workings.

John Traile: Smuggler *by ARTHUR SALCROFT*

Author of "The Twisted Grin," etc.

John Traile, a young and adventurous London solicitor, whilst holiday-making in Devonshire, discovers a very modern gang of smugglers at work. For the love of a lady John allows himself to be drawn into their organisation, and takes his part in rum-running and other still less reputable schemes; but he soon incurs the displeasure of the chief of the smugglers, whose identity is a mystery and who is known merely as Q. T. . .

The Man in the Shadows

by CARROLL JOHN DALY

Author of "The Snarl of the Beast," etc.

Six men are trapped miles from civilisation by a raging storm. One of them, it is decided, must obtain help; so they cut the cards, and the fates arrange that Nixon Casleton shall go. With him, too, goes their hard-won gold; and the food he leaves behind is poisoned . . . The dramatic conclusion to this exciting story and the identity of this man in the Shadows, will hold a surprise for the astutest reader.

HUTCHINSON

General Literature

Biography

UNIFORM WITH *H.R.H. The Duchess of York* (20th thous.)

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No judge has ever caught the imagination of the public and the respect of the legal profession in quite the same way as Mr. Justice Darling. His wit, his fairness to the defendants and prisoners who came before him, and the clear oratory of his charges to the jury quickly singled him out as a judge whose name was to live long in posterity. In this book then, the life of one of our most famous legal luminaries is told.

HUTCHINSON

Biography

Life's Ebb and Flow: *The Memoirs and Reminiscences* of FRANCES, COUNTESS OF WARWICK

In one large handsome volume, with coloured frontispiece and 65 other illustrations, 24s. net.

"I am descended on one side from Nell Gwynn; the other from Oliver Cromwell. The Nell in me is all discretion, the Nell would fain be heard." Thus characteristically Frances, Countess of Warwick, whose world-famed beauty is only matched by her charm, courage and brains, opens her long-expected book of reminiscences and reflections. These memoirs portray intimately and vividly eminent personages of three reigns; in some parts they reveal, in others they throw a new and almost blinding light on social and political events; events in which she took an active part and of which she has inside information possessed by no other living man or woman. For a quarter of a century, Lady Warwick counted among her intimate friends men and women of distinction in every rank of life, not only in this country, but in France and Germany. This remarkable reconstruction of society in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras is illustrated by many photographs of exceptional interest.

My Life Story: From Archduke to Grocer *by* LEOPOLD WOLFLING (EX-ARCHDUKE LEOPOLD OF AUSTRIA)

In one large handsome volume, profusely illustrated, 21s. net.

The eldest son of Ferdinand IV, Grand Duke of Tuscany, by his second marriage with Princess Alice of Parma, the author was born on December 2nd, 1868, at the Imperial Castle of Salzburg which was given to his father by his cousin, the Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria. The author's story is not only a valuable historical document giving intimate details and descriptions of Court life, but it is a record of romance. It is a tragic story; for its main theme centres round the antagonism which was aroused in the late Emperor Francis Joseph against the author. This vendetta began when the Emperor refused to permit Leopold to marry the only real love of his life, the young high-spirited Elvira, daughter of Don Carlos of Bourbon. A more amazing story has never been narrated.

The Life of Sir William Quiller-Orchardson, **R.A.** *by* HILDA ORCHARDSON GRAY

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This "life" deals in detail with Sir William Quiller-Orchardson's early days in Edinburgh and London, his struggles for recognition, and the brilliant success which he finally attained. We are also told of the making of his pictures; his methods of painting; his friendships; his hopes; and of the great happiness of his married life.

HUTCHINSON

Biography

Through Terror to Freedom

by STELLA ARBENINA (*Baroness Meyendorff*)

In one large handsome volume, profusely illustrated, 18s. net

Stella Arbenina, who is an Englishwoman by birth and belongs to one of our oldest families, is married to Baron Paul Meyendorff, and lived in Petrograd until 1918, when she escaped from a Bolshevik prison in which she was confined in a filthy cell with 18 male prisoners—thieves and drunkards—and after countless adventures and ordeals found her way back to England. Her dramatic career has been a sequence of successes on the continent, where she acted in four languages. In this book she gives a vivid personal account of her life before the war: of her acquaintance with members of the Imperial family, and a host of famous people in politics, art, drama and literature. She describes, too, the Revolution's first days of horror, the hardships endured, and finally her arrest and life in prison.

Forty Years with Dogs

By LIEUT.-COLONEL E. H. RICHARDSON

Author of "Watchdogs and Their Training," etc.

In one large handsome volume, fully illustrated, 21s. net.

In this volume Lieut.-Colonel Richardson gives an interesting account of his long and intimate study of dogs, the reasons that drew him to take up this work and where it led him. He describes his particular leaning towards the training of dogs for useful purposes, and how this stimulated his interest in war and police dog training. Episodes of the author's experiences with his dogs in cases of criminal work and also in the Great War will keep the memory green of many dog heroes: whilst descriptions are given of his travels abroad, where the primary object was in connection with some special branch of dog work. A chapter is devoted to discussing the care and management of health in dogs, and much information based on long experience will prove of valuable help to all who are interested in this absorbing subject.

Among War Prisoners in Russia and Siberia

by ELSA BRANDSTROM

With a preface by NATHAN SODERBLÖM, Archbishop of Uppsala

In one large handsome volume, fully illustrated, 18s. net.

The daughter of the well-known Swedish Minister, Elsa Brandstrom worked as a nurse among German prisoners of war in Russia and Siberia. Her book is full of extraordinarily interesting facts, which incidentally reveal the humanity and fine personality of the writer. Where man could not stand the spectacle of the horrors of misery and suffering she often stood, sometimes alone, risking her life for those unfortunates who were victims of the hard hand of fate.

HUTCHINSON

Biography

The Biography of the late Marshal Foch

by MAJOR-GENERAL SIR GEORGE ASTON, K.C.B.

In one large handsome volume, fully illustrated, 24s. net.

An authoritative biography of the greatest soldier of the twentieth century, written by a very distinguished British General, with the assistance of General Sir John Du Cane, K.C.B., British Representative attached to the Staff of Marshal Foch and now Governor of Malta; Brigadier-General Grant, late of Marshal Foch's staff; and many documents, official and otherwise, placed at the author's disposal by various military authorities, both French and English. It is the *only* biography written with the consent of Madame Foch, and with the approval of the Executors of the late Marshal. Not only is this book a complete record of the great Marshal's life, but it contains new facts of the utmost importance relative to the Great War. Documents and maps of the greatest international and historical importance will be included, and these have been kindly lent by His Majesty's Department of Ordnance Survey. But by far the most outstanding feature of this work will be the inclusion of Foch "directives" or orders to the late Earl Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in France; never before published.

Daniel O'Connell: The Irish Liberator

by DENIS GWYNN

In one large handsome volume, with numerous illustrations, 18s. net.

In this new life of the Liberator, Mr. Denis Gwynn has applied modern biographical methods to the famous Irishman whom Gladstone described as the greatest popular leader the world has ever seen. No other life reveals so dramatically the transition from the 18th century to modern times. O'Connell's keenness and audacity won him amazing triumphs in the courts and in Parliament, through a life of sheer personal conflict that provoked many duels. Mr. Gwynn's intimate study shows him both as the passionate idealist idolised by the people, and as a fearless demagogue whose unaided efforts compelled the Duke of Wellington and George IV to emancipate the Catholics after years of vehement resistance.

The Diary and Papers of Lord Cowley

by COLONEL F. WELLESLEY

In one large handsome volume, profusely illustrated, 24s. net.

This volume, which covers the last years of the 18th and the first of the 19th century, contains much that is of importance to students of history and of interest to the general reader. During the latter years of his life Lord Cowley was Ambassador at Vienna and later at Paris, and letters to and from Canning, Wellington, Metternich, Stratford and other important personages are included.

HUTCHINSON

Biography

Things Past *by The DUCHESS OF SERMONETA*

In one large handsome volume, with numerous illustrations, 21s. net.

A childhood spent alternately in an old Roman Palace full of the atmosphere of the Middle Ages and the glamour of the Popes—and in an old Elizabethan house buried in the depths of Norfolk, with riding and shooting and all the joys of a real English Country house life—such was the dual existence of Vittoria Colonna until her twentieth year. After her marriage to the Prince of Teano, eldest son of the Duke of Sermoneta, she was equally familiar with Rome as she was with London, entertaining in one country and being entertained in the other, and meeting many European celebrities during the golden years before the great war. Intimate with Eleonora Duse, Gabriele d'Annunzio, Pierpont Morgan, Marion Crawford, honoured by the friendship of King Edward, she has anecdotes about them all; and as great-niece of the ex-Empress Eugenie she has many stories to tell about her frequent visits to her famous relative. She touches on the history of Rome which is woven into that of her family, the Colonnas, and the family she married into, the Caetams, between which a deadly feud existed up to only a hundred years ago.

Hannen Swaffer's Who's Who

by HANNEN SWAFFER

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Margherita of Savoia

by VAHDAH JEANNE BORDEUX

Author of "Benito Mussolini—the Man," etc.

In one large handsome volume, with numerous illustrations, 18s. net.

Born in 1851, during most troublous times, Margherita of Savoia was destined to see Italy united and to be the first queen of the beloved country of her birth. Beautiful as it is given to few women to be beautiful, intelligent, and above all understanding, through her long and useful life Margherita of Savoia was beloved by rich and poor alike. Great men crossed her path continually, not a few loved her as a woman and friend, and some were loved by her. In her intimate life she had trying and difficult periods, yet she always knew how to keep her place superbly, regally. It is true there were no public rejoicings when, in 1851, Margherita of Savoia was born, but in 1926, when she died, the entire civilised world mourned her.

HUTCHINSON

History

The Story of St. James's Palace

by **BRUCE GRAEME**

Author of "The Story of Buckingham Palace," etc.

In one large handsome volume, profusely illustrated with photogravure plates,
24s. net

A companion volume to *The Story of Buckingham Palace*, which was acclaimed by Press and public as history told in a delightful and readable style. St. James's Palace has a still older and far more romantic history than Buckingham Palace, and the author describes its earliest associations which go back to the time when Westminster was but a swamp and when the descendants of William the Conqueror had established the Norman rule in England. St. James's Palace is replete with history and the details unfolded are as picturesque as they are romantic. An interesting volume beautifully produced.

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Mr. Sergeant deals with the women who have shown dominance in history. These include Cleopatra the Magnificent; Zenobia of Palmyra; Theodora of Byzantium; the amazing series of Tzarinas; the Chinese Empresses; "Duchess Sarah"; Tarabai Rani, and numerous others. There was a wide divergence of character in these imperious ladies; but all had great intellect and some of them great personal beauty.

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Following the successful publication of *Stage Favourites of the Eighteenth Century*, Mr. Lewis Melville has written this companion volume in which he discourses on those actresses who were famous during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Biographies are included of Frances Abington, Sarah Siddons, "Perdita" Robinson, writer of verses and friend of George IV; Elizabeth Farren, who married the Earl of Derby; Dorothy Jordan, a favourite of the indefatigable George IV, and mother of the FitzClarence family; and Harriet Mellon, who married firstly, Coutts the millionaire banker, and secondly, the Duke of St. Albans.

HUTCHINSON

History

Turnpikes and Tollbars

by MARK SEARLE

In two large handsome volumes lavishly illustrated.

The September Massacres

by G. LENOTRE

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Mr. Crofts, the King's Bastard: Being a biography of James, Duke of Monmouth by LEWIS MELVILLE

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Mr. Lewis Melville shows the Duke of Monmouth at once as a romantic and a pathetic figure. Of Monmouth's love-affairs, his friends, his deep longing to succeed his father on the throne, his rebellion, his trial, and his execution, Mr. Melville has much that is of great interest to relate. Important chapters dealing with Monmouth's military expedition in the West Country have been contributed by Major Reginald Hargreaves, M.C.

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HUTCHINSON

Travel

Isles of the Aegean by V. C. SCOTT O'CONNOR

Author of "The Silken East," etc.

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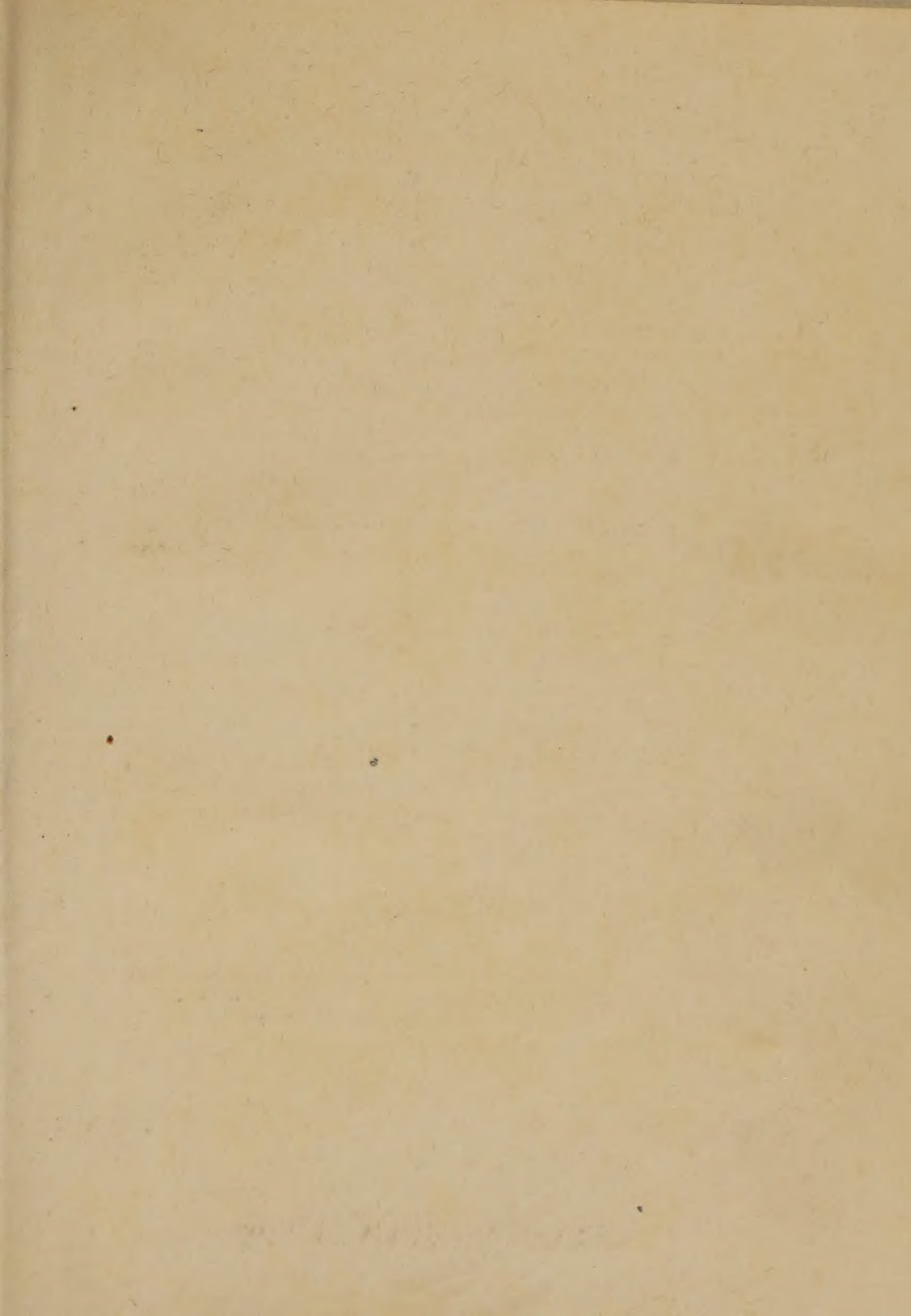
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